

THE OSCAR NIGHT FASHION VICTIMS
Award winners, but losers in style
FEATURES, PAGE 18

WHAT'S WRONG WITH RADIO 1?
The station that can't seem to please anyone
THE EYE

LOLITA: SHOULD SHE BE BANNED?
A moral movie - or just soft-focus porn?
THE EYE

IS IT SAFE TO EAT YOUR GREENS?
The perils that lurk on the veg counter
FEATURES, PAGE 17

THE INDEPENDENT

Wednesday 25 March 1998 45p (R50p) No 3,567

Newspaper of the Year for photographs

Party leaders unite to condemn racism in Britain

By Anthony Bevis
Political Editor

PARTY leaders last night united in an attack on the scourge of racism after *The Independent* urged them to join forces with Tony Blair to celebrate the multi-culturalism of Britain. Their unity is a direct response to deep-seated concerns over racism and underlines a growing determination to tackle it head-on.

Government worries over racism surfaced twice last week: once in

Prime Minister's Question Time; and again when Mr Blair went to Southwark, south London, for a community meeting.

On both occasions, Mr Blair said the fundamental principle of racial equality was shared by every single mainstream party, which explained "why we can be optimistic about the future of race relations."

But *The Independent* believes that racism is endemic, and that it cannot be answered by silence - it needs to be confronted and taken on,

which is why *The Independent* has asked party leaders to speak out.

The first day of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence was told by Michael Mansfield QC, counsel for the Lawrence family, that racism and a desire to protect local white youths meant the police investigation was flawed from the moment Stephen was stabbed at a south London bus stop in 1993.

On the ground evidence of racism is strong, even in cities believed to be well-integrated, like Liverpool.

In a speech to Asian business leaders in London tonight, the Prime Minister will say that much has been done to stamp out racism, but more is needed.

Delivering a powerful statement of faith in Southwark last week, he said: "The single most important thing we can do is to make an absolutely clear statement of behalf of the Government, on behalf of all political parties, on behalf of society, that we believe in, and actually welcome a multi-racial and multi-cultural society: that it's a good thing; that it's not something to be frightened of; that it's actually the type of society we want to bring our children up in."

William Hague said last night: "I warmly welcome *The Independent's* campaign to promote good race relations. The United Kingdom has set an example in the rest of the world in improving race relations, but we must not allow ourselves to become complacent. Britain draws strength

down the barriers of ignorance and distrust which still exist in parts of our society. Good race relations depend on tough but fair immigration policy and firm action to eradicate the scourge of racism."

Paddy Ashdown said: "Racism is an evil which undermines the very fabric of society. As a nation we have come a long way in recent years in tackling intolerance and bigotry, but there is still much to do and we must not allow ourselves to become complacent. Britain draws strength

from diversity. The enormous variety of people of different cultures, religions and races who make up our society make Britain a wonderfully exciting, vibrant and cosmopolitan place to live."

Dafydd Wigley, the Plaid Cymru leader, said: "We abhor racism in all its various guises and will work with others from all democratic political parties, in Wales and throughout the UK, to defeat it at all times."

Lawrence blunders, page 10
Liverpool apartheid, page 10

Ports warned of Iraqi plot months ago

By Jason Bennetto
Colin Brown
and David Osborne

BRITISH intelligence has issued a series of warnings to ports and airports in the past few months about the dangers of Iraqi agents smuggling in a variety of biological and chemical weapons, it emerged yesterday.

Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, also disclosed that a warning that Saddam Hussein could be planning to flood the West with anthrax hidden in bottles disguised as duty-free goods was received 13 days before the Government alerted the ports.

In a further development, an Iraqi scientist who may have tipped off Western intelligence agencies about the anthrax threat and who was planning to defect is reported to have been arrested and thrown into prison.

MIS alerted Customs and Excise officers and Special Branch police at British ports on a number of occasions this year following intelligence suggesting Iraq may be planning biological or chemical attacks.

While the most recent report told ports to be on the look out for anthrax, information about other named substances has been released. Iraq is known to have reserves of Agent VX, a highly toxic nerve agent used against the Kurds, mustard gas, which causes terrible skin damage, and sarin, the nerve agent used in Nazi gas chambers, aflatoxin, which destroys the immune system, and botulinum toxin.

A security source said the anthrax alert was "one of a number of warnings about the possible threat from Iraqi biological and chemical weapons" that had

been issued to the authorities guarding ports and airports, including the Channel Tunnel and Euston.

The source stressed that there was no intelligence to suggest that Britain was to be specifically targeted. The anthrax alert said the threat was against "the enemies of Iraq".

Meanwhile, an official with UNSCOM, the UN body charged with rooting out Iraq's clandestine weapons programmes, confirmed yesterday



Straw: all-ports alerts

Ewen Buchanan, the UNSCOM spokesman, confirmed that Hindawi has been interviewed repeatedly by UN-SCOM investigators, though not recently.

Underplaying the importance of Hindawi, Mr Buchanan said he "was not involved in the production phase" and added that UNSCOM has interviewed "hundreds of other people", besides Hindawi.

Other experts, however, suggested that had he successfully defected, Hindawi could have been crucial to UNSCOM's efforts to reveal the truth about Iraq's biological ambitions.

Confirmation yesterday by Mr Straw that a number of "all ports" alerts had been made since the tension in the Gulf, fuelled suspicions among Labour MPs opposed to war against Iraq that the latest reports are part of a conspiracy to wreck the peace deal brokered with Saddam by the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan.

"I am extremely suspicious that this is an attempt to destabilise the agreement over the ceasefire when it seems to be working rather well. It seems to be the action of somebody who wants to fight," said Tim Dalyell, the veteran Labour campaigner.

In a statement to the Commons, Mr Straw said the latest intelligence report of the anthrax threat reached the Government on 6 March, two weeks before the "all ports" alert was issued. Home Office sources said the delay was caused by the need to assess the seriousness of the threat.

Mr Straw told MPs: "Our information is that there is no specific threat to the UK."

A prayer for the dying: Gere meets Tibetan hunger-strikers



Actor Richard Gere meets one of six Tibetans who are taking part in a 'fast-unto-death' meant to pressure the United Nations into reopening its debate on the future of their country. Gere, a convert to Buddhism, is a strong supporter of Tibetan independence. Report, page 15
Photograph: Reuters

Labour deserts 'seedy' Blackpool for the soft life in chablis-on-sea

By Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Labour's old left has put up with a lot recently, but surely the brothers will never stand for this. The men from Millbank have ended 70 years of tradition by dumping Blackpool from the annual conference circuit.

In a move which will enshrine Labour as the party of Chablis and seafood rather than beer and battered cod, it will meet on the south coast, hundreds of miles from its former heartland, ending a cherished tradition of infighting and politicking along the prom, accompanied by all the tacky

joys Blackpool has to offer. The party says the town is too expensive to get to, its wildly rococo Winter Gardens conference centre too cramped and its hotels too seedy.

Fans of the resort will argue that its famously fierce landladies and over-the-top entertainment are part of the package. But now Labour's National Executive Committee has decided that after one last, long-booked trip in the North this autumn, the gathering will be held in Bournemouth next year, followed by two years running in Brighton.

A party spokesman said the decision was taken with "great

reluctance" and he hoped delegates would return in Blackpool once its problems had been solved. The conference was first held there in 1927, and the party has returned every second year since 1976.

"One factor was the quality of the hall itself. We felt there was a lack of space at Blackpool. It also costs more to go to Blackpool for transport and staffing. There was also some concern at the quality of the hotels and rates that the hotels charge," the spokesman said.

Predictably, Dennis Skinner, the left-wing Labour MP for Bolsover, voted against the move.

Ex-boyfriend named as killer in civil case

By Kate Watson-Smyth

The former boyfriend of the murdered doctor Joan Francisco was yesterday named as her killer in a unique High Court action. Her family alleged that Tony Diedrick stalked the 27-year-old gynaecologist for months out of a "violent and perverted obsession" before strangling her with a vacuum-cleaner cord at her flat in St John's Wood, London, on Boxing Day 1994.

Diedrick, 38, was arrested in March 1995 but released without charge. The Crown Prosecution Service later decided there was not enough evidence to prosecute.

Yesterday there were gasps from Dr Francisco's mother, Venus, and sisters Celia and Margaret as Mr Justice Allott said he had found for the family. Diedrick, from Maida Hill, west London, was out in court and did not give evidence during the case.

It is thought to be the first civil action against someone when there has been no criminal prosecution connected to a murder. The family are seeking £50,000 compensation for alleged assault and battery. The damages will be decided at a private hearing later.

Margaret Francisco said the CPS would be "strongly urged" to charge Diedrick. The family's solicitor, Baz Raza, said that if the did not act and bring charges, a judicial review to challenge that decision would be sought in the High Court.

Mr Justice Allott said the family had established certain facts, including that Diedrick was obsessed by Dr Francisco and stalked her home. He was desperate to speak to her, as he believed she was about to leave

for the US for good or for a long time and that he had demonstrated violence in the past when faced with a comparable situation. Diedrick had an alibi for the relevant period 8.50am to 9.40am on the day of the murder. "I consider that those factors make out a very strong prima facie case. Therefore I have no hesitation in drawing an adverse inference from the defendant's failure to give evidence."

"If the defendant did not kill the deceased, I deem it incredible he would not seize the opportunity to declare his

innocence rather than shelter behind a perceived tactical advantage." Mr Justice Allott said Diedrick probably had no premeditated intent to kill when he entered the flat. "But I am satisfied he first struck and then strangled the deceased by hand and ligature. This is a dreadful judgment to have to pass on any man... but I find the assault and battery alleged, in effect the murder, to have been proved."

Margaret Francisco, speaking for the family, said: "It has been... a very long and difficult struggle, fraught with many ob-

stacles... We feel the road to justice has finally been opened to us." The Metropolitan Police said they were considering the outcome and whether the verdict had any implications for the police investigation. Solicitors for Diedrick, who also offered to pay the costs of the case, said they would appeal.

Fatal attraction, page 7



QUALITY IS A RIGHT. NOT A PRIVILEGE.

Children's vaccine is safe, say experts

By Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

A GROUP of 37 scientific experts has concluded that the combined MMR vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella is safe after reviewing all the evidence linking it with bowel disease and autism.

There was no evidence to indicate any link between the vaccine and the disorders and there was no reason to change the current policy of giving MMR vaccination to children in the second year of life, the experts agreed at a meeting organised by the Medical Research Council.

The MRC assembled the experts from across the country for the special closed meeting on Monday at the request of the Government's Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman. Sir Kenneth asked for the meeting, whose findings were released yesterday, after research published last month in the *Lancet*, suggesting a possible link between the vaccine and the diseases, led to a sharp fall in mothers coming forward to have their children vaccinated.

The chief author of the *Lancet* paper, Dr Andrew Wakefield, of the Royal Free Hospital, attended the MRC meeting and presented the results from his published and unpublished research. Although the paper, signed by 12 co-authors, had said that no causal link between MMR vaccine and bowel disease and autism had been established, Dr Wakefield told a press conference called to publicise the paper at the time that in his opinion the three component vaccines should be given separately to reduce the impact on the child's

immune system. Reports of his remarks triggered widespread alarm among parents and supplies of the separate vaccines were quickly exhausted.

Dr Wakefield was unavailable for comment yesterday. A statement from the Royal Free medical school said it agreed that the policy on MMR vaccination should not be altered.

Sir John Partison, the eminent microbiologist and government adviser on BSE and CJD, who chaired the meeting, said the benefits of MMR vaccination far outweighed the risks and there was no medical justification for giving the vaccines separately. "Children of that age are getting infection after infection. That is part of their development. What is the evidence that [giving the MMR vaccines together] is a bad thing to do? There isn't any."

At a later press conference yesterday, Sir Kenneth said the fall in vaccination rates following the *Lancet* paper was a "very serious issue" but he ruled out making the three vaccines available to parents who requested them. That would mean children having three injections instead of one and exposed them to the risk of going for two years without at least one vaccine during a critical period.

Jabs, the organisation representing parents who believe their children have been damaged by vaccination, criticised the findings. Jackie Fletcher, the group's spokeswoman, said: "We're concerned that this seminar was just a one-day workshop and there was certainly not sufficient time to properly look at the issue. We are calling on the Government to hold a proper, open forum where experts can be invited from abroad."



Fight for greens: Above, 'Justin' defending a tunnel at the poplar tree protest in Kingston, Surrey. Below, police remove an eco-warrior. Photographs: Gretel Ensign/Andy Blackmore

Madness as developer improves the view

By Chris Blackhurst

IT WAS not the promised air-raid siren that woke us up yesterday morning, but the incessant whirr of a police helicopter.

The eco-protesters down the road from our house in Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, promised that when the balliffs came to evict them we would be roused by a klaxon. In the end, it was the drone of a police surveillance unit, just hovering and watching, that shattered our tranquillity.

All winter, along with our neighbours we have given money and signed petition forms in support of the eco-warriors trying to stop the felling of 56 poplar trees in a public park adjoining the River Thames.

The issue was simple: Fairclough Homes had built luxury townhouses on the private

land behind the trees, in order to sell them as having "river views", down the trees had to come. The local council, in a fit of madness, agreed; and down they must come.

These are trees in Canbury Gardens, a quiet, peaceful stretch of river bank close to Kingston town centre. My children play there. Stand in my road and look towards the river and the trees are there, where they have stood since anyone can remember, a splash of nature amid an encroaching urban landscape. Not for much longer.

Yesterday, at an estimated cost to the local council of £500,000, a huge police and security operation swung into force. Its target was our heroes, people who have made us feel embarrassed and more than a little ashamed these past few months; who, while we cosied up in our warm, snug homes,



were prepared to camp out, to live in tree houses, to dig tunnels, to save our poplars.

Not their trees, notice - most of the protesters are not from Kingston, but are veterans of similar campaigns at Newbury and Manchester Airport. This one, though, is different: those efforts were about stopping a road and a runway, which at least would be used by everyone; this is about saving some trees so that some well-off people can have a better view.

The madness that has gripped elsewhere yesterday

descended on our own patch of suburbia. At first light, a flotilla of police and security guards in rubber dinghies sailed up the Thames and landed on the area where my five-year-old likes to play football.

Joined by back-up support - "120 police and 140 private security", said Kingston under-sheriff John Hargrove, in charge of the operation, proudly - they erected security fencing all around. The public river walk was cordoned off, nobody could get near the trees.

Then they started the slow, laborious ritual of hauling the protesters out, one by one. In all, seven people were arrested. More, surely, will follow, as they begin the serious task of clearing the tunnels and bring in the "cherry-pickers" to get them down from the trees.

These events have their own

rhythm and strange, twisted language. Everything was being done for our "safety" and the safety of the protesters, we were told. They kept saying it over and over again. But we were not consulted. Nobody asked us what we thought about the trees; nobody listened when thousands of local people signed a petition asking they be saved; nobody wondered if we minded paying for yesterday's insanity.

Behind the guards with eyes too close together who looked as though they had been bussed in for the two or three days of the clear up, stood a security man brandishing a video camera.

When asked what he was doing, he said he was filming because they liked to learn from each protest, to get it right next time.

And there will be next time - for our own safety, of course.

Pop star takes the ultimate rap for a life of living dangerously

IN THE NEWS

MARK MORRISON

POP stars very, very rarely go to jail. For all the bravado, anti-establishment stances, drugs, under-age sex and demolition of hotel rooms, their behaviour usually falls short of a custodial sentence, writes David Lister, Arts News Editor.

On the few occasions it has happened, good lawyers and public sympathy have usually managed to curtail the extent of the stay inside. The legendary imprisonment of Mick Jagger in the Sixties in fact lasted no more than 48 hours.

Yesterday though, the rap star Mark Morrison was sent down. And for a year. But for Morrison public sympathy is likely to be limited. The case that led to his imprisonment may have had an almost comic element to it. He sent an imposter to do community service for him while he went on tour. But the original crime of affray for which he received the community service involved a violent brawl in which a man was killed.

The self-styled "baddest boy of pop", Morrison's recent history is littered with crime and violence. The 1995 number one hit "Return Of The Mack" for which he is best known appears to have been the catalyst that drove him into lawlessness according to his lawyer, David



Going down: 'Some people can cope and some people cannot.' Mark Morrison was one of those who cannot.

Evans, yesterday. He said that Leicester-born Morrison, who now lives in west London, "had shot into prominence very quickly".

He had buckled under the pressure that exists in "that milieu" and began doing drugs and drugs - but mainly drink, said Mr Evans.

His jailing for 12 months followed a newspaper exposing that the 25-year-old singer sent an imposter to complete the work at a homeless hostel in London on his behalf.

It was the second time Morrison had been before the court

think about the past. As the prosecuting counsel said in court, Morrison had a string of previous convictions and had served a three-month jail sentence for threatening a London police officer with an electric stun-gun last year. He was fined £50 by Leicester magistrates in 1993 for obstructing a police officer and £750 for threatening behaviour in April last year.

Morrison's stage act seemed to parody his off stage violence. As time went by he seemed to find it harder to distinguish between play acting and real life. Morrison was hailed as the future of British soul for "Return Of The Mack", which used the swing beat sound of American soul. Other hits - "Crazy", "Horay" and recently "Moan And Groan" - were said by one critic to have revealed his musical versatility, as well as a one-track mind.

He was born the son of a British soldier in West Germany, spent many of his formative years in Florida before moving back to Britain when he was 19.

Short in stature, he was always laden with gold jewellery and wore designer clothes and rarely travelled without bodyguards. His own management once dropped him on account of his bollywood attitude.

His lawyer concluded yesterday: "Some people can cope and some people cannot. Mr Morrison was one of those who cannot."

It was not sufficient defence to keep the singer out of prison. But it was certainly a concise statement of truth.

Smash! His ceremony he appeared on stage today a fake gun and wearing a T-shirt under which his fur coat bearing the slogan "Not guilty".

ON HIS TIME IN AMERICA

"When I was there, I learned about hunger and ambition."

JUDGE CHRISTOPHER PITCHERS ON MORRISON

"It is quite clear that having found the order inconvenient you decided to use the power your position gave you to avoid doing any more of it. I regard this as showing an arrogant contempt for the order of the court."

THE DEFENCE

"Like some other young men, having reached the pinnacle he has fallen very sharply to earth."

THE STAGE ACT

He brandished handcuffs, backed by female dancers clad as miniskirted WPCs. At a

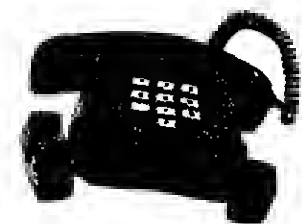
If you knew how much you're being overcharged for life cover, the shock could kill you.

If you took out your life cover a while ago either to protect your mortgage or your family's lifestyle, you could be paying well over the odds.

But now that Direct Line provides life cover, you don't have to pay through the nose anymore. In fact, in only 10 minutes, you could be enjoying the same protection you enjoy now for a much smaller monthly cost.

All it takes is one call - we'll even fill the forms in for you.

If you want life cover at a price that won't shock you, call Direct Line today.



DIRECT LINE
LIFE INSURANCE

0845 3000 233 PLEASE QUOTE REF. LIND

CALL ANYTIME 8am to 8pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm weekends.

*Cover and premiums are subject to individual assessment. Direct Line Life Insurance Company Limited, 250 St. Vincent Street, Glasgow G2 5SH. Tel. 0845 3000 233. Registered in England No. 2199286, Registered Office: 3 Edridge Road, Croydon CR9 1AG. Direct Line Life Insurance Company Limited markets only its own products and offers investment advice only about its own products. Direct Line Life Insurance Company Limited is regulated by the Personal Investment Authority. Calls may be recorded for your added security. Direct Line and the red telephone on wheels are the trademarks of Direct Line Insurance plc and used with its permission.

EU ready to ban drift-net fishing

By Katherine Butler
in Brussels

EUROPEAN UNION governments are ready to accept a ban on "wall-of-death" drift-nets, blamed by environmentalists for wiping out huge numbers of dolphins, whales and other sea mammals.

Twelve of the fifteen EU fisheries ministers - enough to get the measure on to the

statute books - signalled yesterday that they will vote for a ban on using drift nets to catch tuna when the proposal goes to a formal vote in June. Britain, which had until recently opposed a ban, switched sides after winning support for an exemption for salmon fishing in the North and Baltic Seas.

Chairing a meeting in Brussels yesterday, the agriculture minister, Jack Cunningham,

noted that a majority agreed that the problem of unwanted "by-catches" of dolphin and other fish must be quickly addressed. Around 2 per cent of the world's population of striped dolphin is thought to have been killed by drift-netting.

Exactly when the ban could come into play, and the scale of compensation for fishermen hit by the decision, remain a matter for negotiation. "At this

stage all that's agreed is a qualified majority in favour of banning high seas drift-nets. This is more than we expected," said Elliot Morley, the British minister for animal welfare.

He hailed the step as a breakthrough and defended the two-year phase-out time proposed by the British EU presidency. Greenpeace and other environmental groups have been pressing for an EU ban since

1989 and want an immediate end to the practice. But Mr Morley said: "We are closing down a major fisheries sector... you have got to be sensitive to people's livelihoods."

France and Ireland, whose fleets are among the biggest users of drift nets, put up the strongest opposition to a ban even though this form of fishing has been denounced by the UN as an "abominable practice". EU

compensation would be available to help convert boats to long lines, and for tuna fishermen who want to quit. Spain, which has the EU's biggest fishing fleet, has converted to long lines for tuna and has been pushing for other countries, particularly the French, to accept a ban. Spanish anger at the effects of French drift-nets erupted in a series of "tuna wars" in 1994 in the Bay of Biscay.

Arts Council sheds half its members

By David Lister
Arts News Editor

THE Arts Council confirmed yesterday that all its 23 members will be standing down over the coming months and the new chairman, Gerry Robinson, would preside over a slimmed-down council of 10 people.

Mr Robinson, who is also chairman of the Graoada Group, hopes to make the arts funding system more efficient.

The reduction in members is likely to curtail less bloodletting than has been predicted. Five council members are already stepping down as their appointments end on 31 March. It also emerged yesterday that while some of the present council will be encouraged to sit on the new body, there will be no place for regional arts board chairs, or artform panel chairs representing their own advisory panels.

The chief executive, Peter Hewitt, explained that the new council needed to have people with a broad national overview. It is expected that it will include a higher percentage of business leaders. But Mr Hewitt said yesterday: "We will not be sitting up. There will be important figures from the arts world on the council."

Michael Mervitz, artistic director of the Kesh dance com-

pany, which won an ombudsman's ruling against the council's decision to cut its grant, is unconvinced about the promised new efficiency.

He said: "There is a serious divide between the in-house culture of the Arts Council and the broader culture of the arts world as a whole. The question is not how slim the Arts Council is, but whether or not it is socially and culturally representative of a much broader spectrum of the arts and society than it has been."

The new council will devolve some clients to the regional arts boards, whose powers are likely to be increased. Asked whether Arts Council-funded orchestras - which include the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the four London orchestras - would be devolved, Mr Hewitt said that no decision had yet been taken.

The council seemed to be making a stand for better communication in the arts, deciding at the council meeting that "the system should rid itself of cliché and jargon".

However, this resolve was short-lived. The next resolution called for the "the adoption of the more holistic and integrated approach to arts funding". As an example of eschewing jargon, it was not notably successful.



Operatic notes: Elena Kelesidi, who plays the lead in the forthcoming performance of Verdi's *La Traviata* at the Albert Hall in London. Photograph: Laurie Lewis

Brighton pier lands grants for £14m

By Clare Garner

BRIGHTON'S historic West Pier, which has been closed to the public since 1975 for fear that it might fall down, has been awarded a £10.65m Lottery grant to help restore it to its former glory, it was announced yesterday.

A further £3.55m of lottery money has been allocated for work above-deck to restore the stunning Victorian concert hall, pavilion, arches and balustrading.

England's only Grade I listed pier will be resurrected as a leisure complex featuring restaurants, shops, a health spa and a museum, at a cost of £35m.

Two of the largest private investors drafted in to make the pier commercially viable are London Regional Properties and the restaurateur Oliver Peyton's Gruppo group.

Mr Peyton, 35, one of the youngest, hippest entrepreneurs in London, who has set up the successful Atlantic Bar and Grill restaurant, Coast and Mash, will oversee the running of the pier. He promises to turn Brighton into a British Miami.

Yesterday the Irishman, who opened his first seafood nightclub aged 19, said the new pier would include two restaurants, two bars, an art gallery, a theatre/concert venue, mooring for 60 boats, an outdoor auditorium and "lots of things I can't talk about yet". He added: "The pier is really one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen."

Since 1975 the structure of the pier, which was built in 1866 at a cost of £27,000, has been disintegrating, a process speeded up by successive batterings in stormy weather.

Developers hope work will begin in June or July and although the completion date is 2002, the West Pier Trust hopes to make the pier accessible to the public by 2000.

GTech fights to hold on to its lottery licence

THE BOARD of Gtech, shareholders in the lottery operator Camelot, spent nearly four hours yesterday trying to persuade the National Lottery regulator, Oflot, that they are "fit and proper" people to help run the lottery.

The meeting was called following Richard Branson's victory in a libel case in which Gtech's disgraced former director, Guy Snowden, was alleged to have tried to bribe the Virgin boss to withdraw from the race to win the lottery licence. William O'Connor, chief executive of Gtech, emerged from the meeting saying that it had been "candid and thorough". John Stoker, Oflot's acting director general, who could revoke Camelot's licence, is seeking assurances that Gtech has never - and is not currently - involved in unlawful activities. He intends to deliver a verdict "shortly". — Clare Garner

Haughey's court challenge

THE FORMER Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, his wife, daughter and his two sisters yesterday began a High Court action in Dublin challenging the right of a judicial tribunal to carry out what has been dubbed a "trawl" through his family's finances. The inquiry into his financial affairs during his period in cabinet was instigated by the Dail last year after an earlier investigation revealed that while Taoiseach he received secret payments totalling £1.3m from the stores magnate Ben Dunne. The hearing was postponed for three weeks after Mr Haughey broke his hip in a riding accident. — Alan Murdoch, Dublin

Men face charges of murder

TWO MEN appeared in court yesterday accused of the murder of a couple from Aberfoyle who vanished on their way home from a Christmas shopping trip on 18 December. Iain Melkham, 29, and John Parker, 27, appeared in private at Dumfries Sheriff Court charged with the alleged murder of Roderick and Anne Marie Aitken, both 38.

Drunk pedestrians

ALMOST A THIRD of Scottish pedestrians had been drinking prior to being hurt in road accidents, according to research published yesterday. Pedestrians were also found to have drunk more than any other category of road accident victims. The Scottish Office study of records from five hospitals showed that 9 per cent of all road accident casualties had been drinking.

Independent winners

FOUR WRITERS and a photographer from *The Independent* and two writers from the *Independent on Sunday* have been short-listed for the Glenfiddich Awards - the most important awards for food and drink journalists. No other national newspaper has received more than two nominations.

Former Bibendum chef Simon Hopkinson, and his colleague Annie Bell, who both write for *The Independent's* Saturday magazine "ISM", are nominated for the Newspaper Cookery Writer of the Year award while Anthony Rose, who also writes for "ISM", is nominated as Wine Writer of the Year. Michael Jackson, who writes on beer, is nominated for the Drink Writer of the Year award. Patrice de Villiers has been short-listed for the Visual Award. Michael Bateman of the *Independent on Sunday* is nominated as Food Writer of the Year. His colleague Richard Ehrlich has also been short-listed for Drink Writer of the Year. The awards take place on 16 April. — Rosa Prince

BT's call prices - down, down and down again.

10% OFF

10% OFF

Friends & Family
Save 10% every time, whenever you call your ten most popular numbers.

20% OFF

BestFriend

New and better savings. 20% off each call to your most popular Friends & Family UK number - that's equivalent to 1 whole minute FREE for every 5 minute call. (Savings begin on 1st May)

25% OFF

Top 10 Numbers

Add PremierLine to Friends & Family and a five minute national weekend call costs only 12p. (15% saving on mobile calls)

43% OFF

International Calls

BT's new Country Calling Plan, combined with PremierLine and Friends & Family Overseas, saves you 43% on up to five nominated numbers.

BT has cut standard call prices 13 times in two years as well as developing a whole range of discounts. These are designed to suit the calls you make - giving you extra savings. If anyone claims they can give you cheaper calls than BT, call 0800 003 800 to check you're getting all your discounts.

BT It's good to talk

Call us NOW on 0800 003 800 and check you're getting all your discounts.

PREMIERLINE & FRIENDS & FAMILY IS NOT AVAILABLE WITH LIGHT USER SCHEME. BESTFRIEND - EXCLUDES MOBILE. PREMIERLINE COSTS 15p PER MINUTE. COUNTRY CALLING PLAN COSTS 15p PER MINUTE. 43% OFF CALLS TO 10 COUNTRIES. AVAILABLE. EXCLUDES CHARGED COUNTRY CALLS. MINIMUM CHARGE 3p PER CALL. PRICES QUOTED ARE BT'S WEEKEND RATE PER MINUTE.

Be sensible, have £20

The Alliance Current Account gives you £20 for joining

...and a £20 bonus for opening a new current account with Alliance Leicester. The £20 bonus is payable on the day you open your new current account. To qualify for the £20 bonus, you must fund your account within 2 months of the account opening date. When in credit. All information correct at time of going to press. For security and trading purposes telephone calls between you and Alliance & Leicester or its subsidiaries may be recorded or monitored. Alliance & Leicester plc, Registered Office 48 Park Lane, London W1Y 4EQ.

...and a £20 bonus for opening a new current account with Alliance Leicester. The £20 bonus is payable on the day you open your new current account. To qualify for the £20 bonus, you must fund your account within 2 months of the account opening date. When in credit. All information correct at time of going to press. For security and trading purposes telephone calls between you and Alliance & Leicester or its subsidiaries may be recorded or monitored. Alliance & Leicester plc, Registered Office 48 Park Lane, London W1Y 4EQ.

...and a £20 bonus for opening a new current account with Alliance Leicester. The £20 bonus is payable on the day you open your new current account. To qualify for the £20 bonus, you must fund your account within 2 months of the account opening date. When in credit. All information correct at time of going to press. For security and trading purposes telephone calls between you and Alliance & Leicester or its subsidiaries may be recorded or monitored. Alliance & Leicester plc, Registered Office 48 Park Lane, London W1Y 4EQ.

...and a £20 bonus for opening a new current account with Alliance Leicester. The £20 bonus is payable on the day you open your new current account. To qualify for the £20 bonus, you must fund your account within 2 months of the account opening date. When in credit. All information correct at time of going to press. For security and trading purposes telephone calls between you and Alliance & Leicester or its subsidiaries may be recorded or monitored. Alliance & Leicester plc, Registered Office 48 Park Lane, London W1Y 4EQ.

...and a £20 bonus for opening a new current account with Alliance Leicester. The £20 bonus is payable on the day you open your new current account. To qualify for the £20 bonus, you must fund your account within 2 months of the account opening date. When in credit. All information correct at time of going to press. For security and trading purposes telephone calls between you and Alliance & Leicester or its subsidiaries may be recorded or monitored. Alliance & Leicester plc, Registered Office 48 Park Lane, London W1Y 4EQ.

ALLIANCE LEICESTER

مركز من الامم



Who's Who confessions

"ONE OF the great ornaments of British civilisation," was how Lord Jenkins of Hillhead described *Who's Who* at its 150th birthday bash on Monday night.

It was also the 50th anniversary of Roy's first inclusion in the social climber's bible and he celebrated with a rousing speech to the assembled "names" in the long room of the National Portrait Gallery. Confessing that he is an avid browser of both *Who's Who* and *Who Was Who*, his only complaint was about people who refused to allow their home addresses to be published. Did these literary types who gave their agents' addresses really fear that their gardens would be invaded by a mob of fawning readers?

Unsurprisingly for a celebration that was also a promotional event, a large percentage of the names on the list of invited guests was made up of journalists. So much so, perhaps, that it confused people. One lady, wedged between the vivid portraits of Bobby Charlton and Salman Rushdie, was overheard to say, "Oh look, there's Kenneth Baker. Doesn't he have a lovely tan. Didn't he used to read the news on television?" One journalist not on the printed list of guests but very much in evidence at the party was Andrew Neil. Pandora could not believe that the shy, retiring Glaswegian editor-in-chief and chat-show host would have crashed such an event. Sure enough, a spokeswoman for *Who's Who* explained, "He was invited but he was a bit naughty and didn't bother to reply." As busy as he is these days, perhaps Neil confused the party with his usual evening out at Tramp.

High jinks in Hollywood

FORGET about *Vanity Fair's* big show-off post-Oscar party, all the genuine fun this year took place over the weekend at Miramax's pre-awards Hollywood party. In vivid contrast to the marvellous Academy ceremony, Robin Williams (right) performed a rude and totally unsentimental stand-up act while Madonna rolled in the aisles with laughter. Then, reports the *New York Post*, Matt Damon, star and co-author of the Miramax blockbuster *Good Will Hunting*, dressed up as a woman to spoof *Mrs Brown*. Finally, Dame Judi Dench and Helena Bonham Carter put on hard-hats for their take-off of *Hunting*. Perhaps next year Miramax will film their party and offer it as a genuinely funny television alternative to Billy Crystal's wretched jokes.



Feeling faint at Filthy's

A PERFORMANCE that sounds rather more British (and considerably less fun) took place recently at Filthy McNasty's pub in Islington: a reading of *The Smoke King* by author Maurice Leitch. Among the guests was former dope lord, bestselling author and cannabis crusader Howard Marks, who brought along his mum. The reading went on ... and on ... and on. Suddenly a man standing beside Marks along one wall of the room fell over in a dead faint. One wag asked, "Was it because of the powerful fumes from Howard's hair?" Or just a contact high?

Mo's Irish mystery

WHO WILL be the next Director of Information at the Northern Ireland Office - the job otherwise known as "Mo's Mouthpiece"?

One rumour that has reached Pandora's ear about the replacement for Andy Wood, long-time holder of the position, says that the new appointment will be Cherie Dodd, the former *Mirror* political correspondent recently shifted to cover industrial affairs for the paper. When Pandora rang the *Mirror* yesterday to congratulate Cherie, she was out of the office. "In Northern Ireland for the day," said a newsdesk spokesman. "She'll be back tomorrow." But not for long, as the job is a three-year appointment and Cherie is intending to move the whole family to Belfast.

Mandelson changes socks

AN IMPORTANT correction was made to later editions of press releases of Peter Mandelson's speech to the Newspaper Conference at the Hilton yesterday. In the original draft, the Minister without Portfolio was quoted as saying "The Dome is a wonderful building and the contents are going to blow your socks off." Subsequent versions changed the verb "blow" to the verb "knock". Pandora can well understand why this change was made and compliments the Minister for doing an absolutely first-rate job.

Pandora

DAILY POEM

Somewhere

By Neil Powell

Logs are being sawn somewhere:
Easing through the softened air;

Heavy with rain and sodden leaves,
The sound of blade on timber gives

An edge to cloud's infinities,
Mist buttresses the nervous trees,

Smoke jostles where the cloud resists,
But there below the saw persists.

The blade gives edge to what it takes,
The world is split. The timber breaks.

Our poems until Friday come from Neil Powell's *Selected Poems* (Carcantet, £8.95). Powell, who lives in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, has published critical works such as *Carpenters of Light* and *The Language of Jazz* as well as four collections for Carcanet since 1977.



Knight in shining armour: Sir John Hall yesterday

Bold Sir John back to save Newcastle image

By Simon Turnbull

THE sound of alarm bells from the corridors of St James' Park accompanied the announcement in September last year that Sir John Hall would be standing down as chairman of Newcastle United Football Club. It proved to be a false alarm for the officers of the Tyne and Wear Fire Brigade, but not a false omen for the flagship of Tyneside.

"I feel I've done everything I set out to achieve," Sir John said six months ago. "I want to do a lot of other things. I want to finish the gardens at Wynyard Hall."

Yesterday, the bold Sir John left behind the trowel and the mower at his Co Durham estate to attend to the boardroom mess at the club. He did so as the knight in shining armour,

having accepted the challenge of restoring Newcastle United's tarnished reputation.

His son, Douglas, and his successor as chairman, Freddy Shepherd, were not around to face the music of a sube packed to the rafters with members of the media at St James' Park. Having reluctantly done the decent thing, however, and fallen upon the boardroom sword, they left Sir John with no option but to not so much pick up the gauntlet as run with it.

The millionaire property developer whose money financed Newcastle's rise from near bankruptcy in 1992 to a place in the European Cup agreed yesterday to return as chairman of the football club until the end of May. He did so with anger in his heart: not, it transpired, for his prodigal son and the straying Shepherd, but

for the very unveiling of their shortcomings in the black and white of the *News of the World*.

"The effect on the Hall and the Shepherd families has been awful," he said, "and the effect on Newcastle United has been sad to watch. Freddy and Douglas are full of remorse and can't apologise enough."

"They have worked tirelessly over the years to bring jobs to the North-east and to build Newcastle United from a club on the brink of bankruptcy and the old Third Division to a major force in the game. They are the ones who brought me to the club ... That has been forgotten in the last 10 days."

The vilification has been terrible to watch. Yes, it was self-inflicted. But why were they targeted? Why were they set-up? I have been astonished to learn that one of the people

involved in this expensive scam has a criminal record. The human cost has been immense. Please, please let us get on with our lives."

It was not so much a conference as a tirade. Sir John took no questions as he made his stern-faced departure. It had been different six months ago. The last word then belonged to the chairman-elect. "We hope Sir John makes good use of his bus pass," Mr Shepherd had said.

Yesterday, as Sir John returned, the chairman-deposed was not in the mood to talk let alone joke. Tracked down to a Barbados beach, Freddy Shepherd told a BBC television crew "no comment", before thrusting a paperback in front of the camera lens. It was a bit late for a cover up.

Business Outlook, page 23

We are not suggesting anyone needs to jump hurdles

over the nearest filing cabinet. Nor are we saying

running rings around the boss is a wise political move.

But if we tell you that CDX by K is a classic, executive

style shoe with all the advanced design innovation of

a sports shoe, then you might be catching our drift.

Today's sophisticated trainers feature an unsur-

passed level of 'comfort technology'. To incorporate

similar design features in shoes for work (which we

spend the majority of our time wearing) would make

sense. And that's precisely what we've done.

The results of this are benefits previously only

heard of on the sports field. The CDX range offers

an anti-shock system between your heel, ball of foot

and the ground reducing impact and tiredness.

Beneath the deceptive executive exterior is an under-

foot carbon layer which absorbs moisture and heat

keeping your feet cooler.



Jarrow, CDX by K



Jesmond, CDX by K

Add to this other CDX features, such as full calf

leather linings and socks for a breathable environ-

ment. Plus, the CDX 'anti-slip, hardwearing, K-Tread

700 section' within a high quality leather sole -

a design which provides extra grip and durability.

So now you know the facts, you are probably

expecting a high cost for such comfort. Let us tell

you the best news -

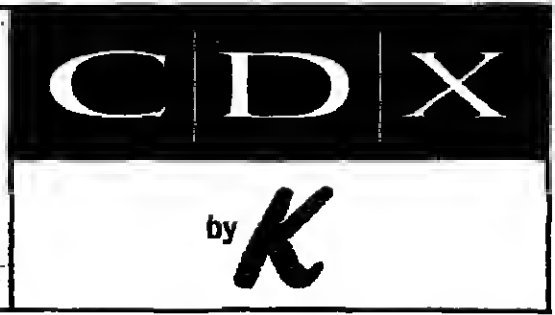
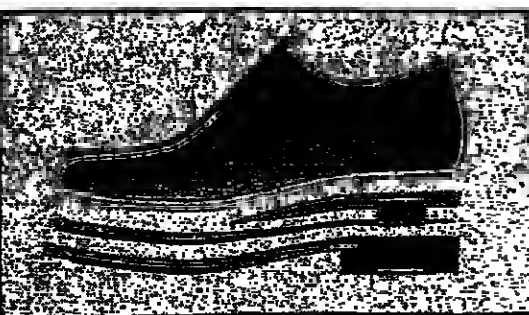
That's for a classic, executive styled shoe with all

the features you'd normally expect from an athlete's

running shoe. Make sure you race around to your

nearest K Shoe Shop, Clarks Shop or leading

K Stockist to try on a pair today.



CDX shoes by K incorporate a wide range of individual specifications. For details of your nearest stockist please call 0980 665335. Sizes 6-12 (except 11½).

Blair denies aiding Murdoch bid for stake in Italian TV

By Colin Brown
and Andrew Gurnbel

QUESTIONS remained unanswered last night over whether Tony Blair met Rupert Murdoch to discuss the media magnate's attempts to take a stake in the Italian broadcasting market.

The Prime Minister in Paris denied doing any favours for Mr Murdoch after the Mr Blair's official spokesman in London had angrily described as "a joke" reports that Mr Blair had intervened on Mr Murdoch's behalf over the takeover.

Downing Street sources said the Prime Minister had held talks last week with Romano Prodi, the Prime Minister of Italy, over the telephone, but insisted that the call came from Mr Prodi. That version of events was confirmed in Rome.

However, Mr Blair's spokesman refused to deny that Mr Blair used the opportunity to discuss the Murdoch issue. "They had a discussion about common issues and I do not in-



Rupert Murdoch: Sucked into complex political game

terfere in what would have been a private meeting."

The unanswered questions could prove embarrassing for Mr Blair as the Government faces the prospect of having to overturn a Lords defeat on the Competition Bill which, if unchanged, could prevent Mr Murdoch selling the *Times*, owned by his News Corp group at a cut-rate price.

The embarrassment for the Prime Minister over the reports may have been eclipsed by the discomfort for Mr Murdoch who had found himself sucked into a complex Italian political game in which he was played for a fool. According to Mr Murdoch's Italian lawyers, it was Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Opposition leader and former prime minister, who initiated the dialogue with Mr Murdoch by inviting BSkyB, in which he has a stake, to make an offer for Mr Berlusconi's media holding company Mediaset.

Sources in Italy said Mr Murdoch could not have talked

to Mr Blair before Friday at the earliest. That was the day the deal collapsed and Mr Murdoch left Italy. But it seems he left a door open: Mr Murdoch and Mr Berlusconi met again in London on Saturday to discuss other areas of possible mutual interest.

"The deal is off for the moment, but I would not be surprised if negotiations resumed for a third time," commented one source close to the Murdoch camp. Shares in Mediaset fell on Monday on news that the take-over had collapsed, but they steadied yesterday.

Mr Berlusconi's previous flirtation with selling to Mr Murdoch, in 1995, went nowhere as Mediaset opted instead for a recapitalisation and a flotation on the Milan stock exchange.

"Mr Murdoch did not want a repeat of his last negotiations, which lasted several months before ending in failure. He agreed to make an offer, but gave Berlusconi just 72 hours to

decide," explained Luca Arnaboldi, of the legal firm Carnelutti in Milan.

An offer of 10,000 lire per share - or 5.8 trillion lire for Mr Berlusconi's controlling 50.6 per cent stake in Mediaset - was put on the table over dinner at Mr Berlusconi's private chateau at Arcore, outside Milan, 10 days ago. Mr Murdoch then withdrew to the Villa d'Este on the shores of Lake Como and waited for a reply.

On Thursday, with just hours to go before the deadline, the supposedly top-secret talks began to be artfully leaked, first to the Milan newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and then to Mr Berlusconi's own Canale 5 evening news programme. Senior figures in Italy's centre-left coalition government immediately reacted, urging Mr Berlusconi to prevent the country's private television stations falling into foreign hands. "Better Berlusconi than Murdoch," was the reaction of one left-winger.

Blair's muddle, page 17

Peer condemns 'lobbyist' Prime Minister

By Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

LORD McNALLY, the Liberal Democrat peer, provided the best take yesterday on the Prime Minister's actions on behalf of Rupert Murdoch's business plans in Italy: "Here we are straining every sinew to make sure lobbyists in Parliament are controlled. Then we find out that the Prime Minister is a lobbyist."

But he is not surprised. It was he who sponsored the amendment to the competition Bill passing through Parliament that would end the predatory pricing tactics of Mr Murdoch's *Times* newspaper.

The Government, because of its friendly relations with Mr Murdoch, opposed the amendment but was defeated by a cross-party alliance of peers by 121 votes to 93. Nevertheless, when the Bill returns to the Commons in 10 days time, the Government will rip the

amendment from it. "There is to be no compromise measure," said Lord McNally. "The only question is the lengths they go to, whipping for Murdoch, to quell any Labour revolt."

The protection of the *Times* pricing policy is just one of a number of issues where the Blair government has come to the aid of the News Corp empire.

In the aftermath of the HarperCollins disposal of the book by Chris Patten, former governor of Hong Kong, and *Times* correspondent Jonathan Minsky's assertion that that newspaper is soft on China, the Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, asked the Government to look at the conditions that permitted Mr Murdoch to take over the *Times* in 1981.

The then trade secretary, John Biffen, laid down eight conditions for a non-referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and Mr Ashdown wrote to Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of

Trade, to ask her to look at how these conditions were being breached over China.

Ms Beckett wrote to Mr Ashdown washing her hands of the paper's editorial independence: "Disputes between management and the editor on breaches on independence... are a matter for the editor of the *Times* and the [Times] independent national directors and not for the Government" - which is exactly the opposite of what parliament was told in 1981.

In the same way, the Government has dismissed out of hand the requests of Labour backbenchers and countless others for new ownership legislation that would reduce the scale of Mr Murdoch's holdings in the United Kingdom.

The Blair government has also come to the aid of Mr Murdoch in less direct ways. As the biggest newspaper proprietor, he had most to gain by Mr Blair's immediate rejection of privacy legisla-

tion in the aftermath of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

For the same reason, the imminent government decision on how to protect the press, and the Press Complaints Commission, from the privacy provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights cannot be seen as driven purely by a desire to protect press freedom. Even inadvertently the Government can be seen to favour Mr Murdoch. Last week's decision by an independent working party looking at the "jewels in the crown" sports (those protected for terrestrial television) to loosen the protection for English home cricket test matches, can be seen to hand BSkyB yet another sport.

All of which makes Tony Blair rather more valuable than the average Westminster lobbyist. The question is whether Mr Murdoch will pay his price of support at the next election and over a move to monetary union.

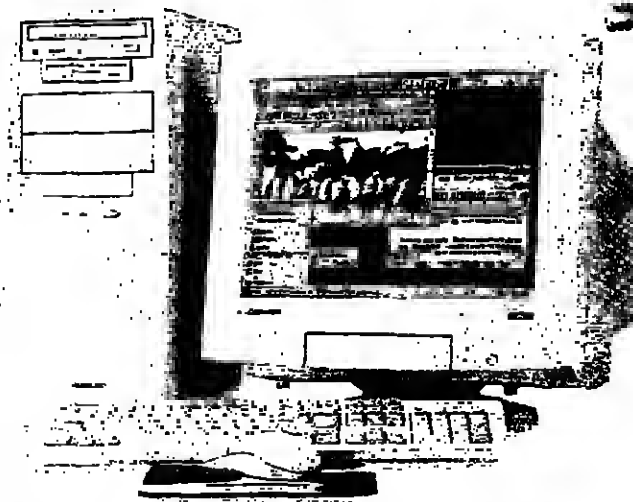


Clearing up: John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, with Leon Valero, a seven-year-old asthma sufferer, in London yesterday to launch a government campaign called Doing Your Bit which aims to cut pollution

Photograph: Peter Jordan/PA

THE Freshest

333MHz
PROFESSIONAL
SYSTEM



From the COMPANY that was BORN on a FARM

Since Gateway 2000 began life on a farm, we understand more than most the importance of a fresh product. That's why we build your computer only when you order it. This way you know your PC hasn't been sitting in a warehouse gathering dust. The G6-333SE system shown here is only one example of what Gateway 2000 can make for you. We'd like to chat with you first, however, to find out your needs. You'll find our fresh technology, together with our technical support for as



long as you own your GATEWAY™ system, makes Gateway 2000 unbeatable value. Call us on the freephone number shown here, not forgetting to ask about our flexible finance options.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intel 333MHz Pentium® II Processor 64MB SDRAM, (expandable to 384MB) 512KB Pipeline Burst Cache 4.3GB 10ms Ultra ATA Hard Drive 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive Mitsumi 23X min/22X max 90mm CD-ROM STB DV3D AGP 3D Graphics Accelerator, w/ 4MB SDRAM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17" EV700 TCO-92 0286p Monitor ATX Mini Tower Case Microsoft® Windows® 95 105 Keyboard MS® Windows 95, MS IntelliMouse McAfee Anti-Virus Software MS Office 97 Small Business Edition plus Encarta® 97 (US Version) and MS Money 97 3 Year Limited Warranty |
|--|--|

£1299 (£1560.40 inc VAT & Delivery)



0800 39 2000
http://www.gateway2000.co.uk

Gateway 2000 - Clonsilla Industrial Estate - Dublin 17 - Ireland

©1998 Gateway 2000 Europe. Black-and-white spot design. "G" logo. "You've got a friend in the business" design. GATEWAY and GATEWAY 2000 are trademarks or registered trademarks of Gateway 2000, Inc. The Intel Inside Logo and Pentium are registered trademarks and MMX is a trademark of Intel Corporation. All other brands and product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies. All configurations and prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. All prices are in Sterling. All sales subject to Gateway 2000 European standard terms and conditions and limited warranty. Industry standard practice is to measure monitors using the CRT size. Actual viewing area can be approx. 12% less.

Employers may sack staff to take on New Deal recruits

By Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

THE Government's flagship New Deal programme will inevitably push some young people out of work to create places for others who are on the scheme. Whitehall officials conceded yesterday.

One of the key aims of the initiative is to help the most disadvantaged into work and young people regarded as more employable may have to pay the price, according to a senior civil servant at the Department for Education and Employment.

Some employers may dismiss existing staff in order to take advantage of the £60-a-week government subsidy for providing work for young people on the

New Deal. For the same reason, it is also likely that more capable job applicants will be rejected in favour of "sponsored" recruits.

Ministers hope the "substitution and displacement effect" will be limited and argue that it is a price worth paying. A briefing paper issued by the department yesterday admits that some of those in the target group - 18 to 24-year-olds who have been out of work for more than six months - may get jobs at the expense of others "who either become unemployed, or stay in unemployment when they would have left it".

It adds: "These will largely be people who will be able to find jobs without much intervention from us. If the overall

employability of the workforce is raised, this should over time increase the economy's capacity to grow."

The scheme has been piloted in 12 "pathfinder" areas since 5 January and not one participant has so far fallen foul of the rules which ultimately provide for a 40 per cent cut in benefit, ministerial advisers said.

After a "Gateway" period of up to four months, participants are offered four options: a place on the Government's environmental task force, work with a voluntary organisation, full-time training or education, or a subsidised job. Ministers are fond of saying that there is no "fifth option".

Officials yesterday were at pains to point out that the New

Deal may have a spurious impact on labour market statistics. Unemployed young people who move into a subsidised New Deal job for instance, will be shown as moving from the dole into employment.

Advisers accepted that this would only be "real" employment if the young person was kept on when the subsidy came to an end. The Government wanted to be open about such effects and did not want to be accused of "fiddling the figures".

Ministers were not interested in simply switching young people off benefit into dead-end jobs or schemes, they wanted to transform the long-term prospects of the most disadvantaged, the briefing paper said.

Last vestiges of caning swept away of 'the new sleaze'

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A LIBERAL Democrat MP last night spoke of his "shame" at caning children as MPs voted to sweep away the last vestiges of corporal punishment in independent schools.

Former secondary school teacher, Phil Willis, the MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough, said: "Whenever I caned a child, I felt demeaned by it. Quite frankly, I felt quite ashamed later in life to feel that for many years I supported the use of corporal punishment."

Caning is banned in state schools but a handful of independent schools, some with strong religious connections, still administer corporal punishment. MPs were given a free vote by the Government to extend the ban in the independent schools during the final Commons stages of the School Standards Bill.

Elton, Harrow and the major public schools have all banned

caning, and the Independent Schools Council welcomed the extension of the ban on all corporal punishment.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on education, challenged Tory backbenchers who defended "spanking" on the grounds that it did children no harm. "How do they know?" he said. "I have been caned. It did me harm."

Mr Willis said there was a need to use a degree of force, sometimes to protect pupils, but caning was an admission of failure in discipline in schools. The ban will also stop punishment with a slipper or a ruler. It will still allow parents to smack their children, and smacking by child minders with the approval of parents.

Corporal punishment in prisons and borstals was prohibited in 1967 - the same year that the Plowden report "Children and their Primary Schools" recommended banning corporal punishment in schools.

By Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

LABOUR'S plans to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds through sponsorship this year amount to "the new sleaze," one of its MPs has told an inquiry.

Publication of the submission from Paul Flynn to the Neill inquiry into party funding comes just a day after *The Independent* revealed how Labour is seeking sponsorship through lobbying firms. The party is maintaining links with staff who now work as lobbyists and has asked them to raise money from their clients.

Mr Flynn, MP Newport West, has told Sir Patrick Neill that his party's own suggestions on future political funding do not mention sponsorship at all. This could allow companies to avoid the new regulations, he said, and to give money without consulting their shareholders.

Although Labour declares all donations and sponsorship over

£5,000, Mr Flynn said the limit could be difficult to police where payments were made in kind.

He urged the Neill Committee to look closely at the issue of sponsorship. Labour was planning to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds in that way this year, and the Tories had been known to use the same methods.

He gave Sir Patrick a list of recent Labour sponsorship deals, including funding for a Welfare to Work breakfast by British Aerospace, funding for a new MPs induction conference by the drug company Novartis and funding for a Welfare Reform roadshow by NTL Cabletel.

A Labour spokesman said its submission to the committee did not mention sponsorship because "it was not an attempt to draw up a new law. If somebody sponsors an event in the Labour Party and if that sponsorship amounts to more than £5,000, that is open and declared. The suggestion that there is some sort of secret dealing is wrong."

High-flyer whose attraction was fatal

By Kate Watson-Smyth

YOUNG, black, female gynaecologists are rare in the NHS and Joan Francisco was all of these. She was also stunningly attractive and intelligent. But, as her sister Margrette said, she had a certain naivety and was a poor judge of character and poor chooser of men.

Dr Francisco's relationship with Tony Diedrick ended in December 1988 but he refused to accept it was over and on Boxing Day three years ago Dr Francisco was found dead in her west London flat. She had been due to fly to Los Angeles to spend the end of Christmas with her sisters, Margrette and Celia. Her funeral was attended by some of Britain's leading doctors and she was buried wearing her stethoscope.

Diedrick was arrested in March 1995 but freed without charge. The Francisco family then brought a civil action and yesterday Diedrick was named in the High Court as the murderer of Dr Francisco. The family is claiming up to £50,000 compensation.

Giving judgment, Mr Justice Auld said Dr Francisco was a "remarkably attractive woman" who climbed high from a humble background. She drove a BMW, went to clubs and friends included the former Wimbledon footballer John Fashanu and the boxer Lennox Lewis.

But the picture of the jet-setting party animal was tempered by a more intimate portrait of the home-loving baby of the family who played her mother's favourite pieces on the piano and delighted in giving surprise presents. The Franciscos lived in a modest house in Acton, west London, and the three children were encouraged to be curious from an early age.

Their mother, Venus, from St Lucia, was a nurse, and their father, Alfred, from Belize, taught maths, physics and technical drawing in a secondary school until his retirement.

In an interview with the Independent last year Margrette recalled the family moving to Saudi Arabia for a couple of years when the sisters were

young. "Father taught us at home, as though he was teaching secondary-school students. He taught Joan to use a slide rule when she was five. He encouraged us to 'have seeking minds and always be curious'."

All three sisters went to a school that was mainly white but race was never an issue for them.

"What we projected was what we expected and what we received," said Margrette, who, with Celia, is a lawyer in Los Angeles. All three did well at school but Joan was the star.

"She was the most focused of all of us. When she had to study she wanted everybody else out of the way. She would listen to study tapes in her sleep in the hope that she would learn subliminally."

"She gave up chocolates for Lent and then later decided it wasn't wise for a child to eat them. So, at the age of nine, she gave up for good. At one stage, she decided that white flour wasn't good for her, so she baked her own bread every morning."

But Dr Francisco also loved to dance and play the piano. At school she did the high jump and played netball.

However, her potential was not always appreciated at school and when she wanted to apply to medical college she was told she would not succeed, despite gaining straight As at A-level.

With a determination typical of the entire Francisco family she applied for and was accepted by all five medical schools that she chose. She took up a place in 1991 at the Royal Free Medical Hospital, where she specialised in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Margrette said recently: "She loved her work and cared passionately about her patients. She said bringing life into the world and saving lives was the most valuable contribution she could make."

Venus said simply: "I shed tears every day for the loss of my precious daughter who brought life to so many during her short life as a gynaecologist and obstetrician. What a waste of life and talent."

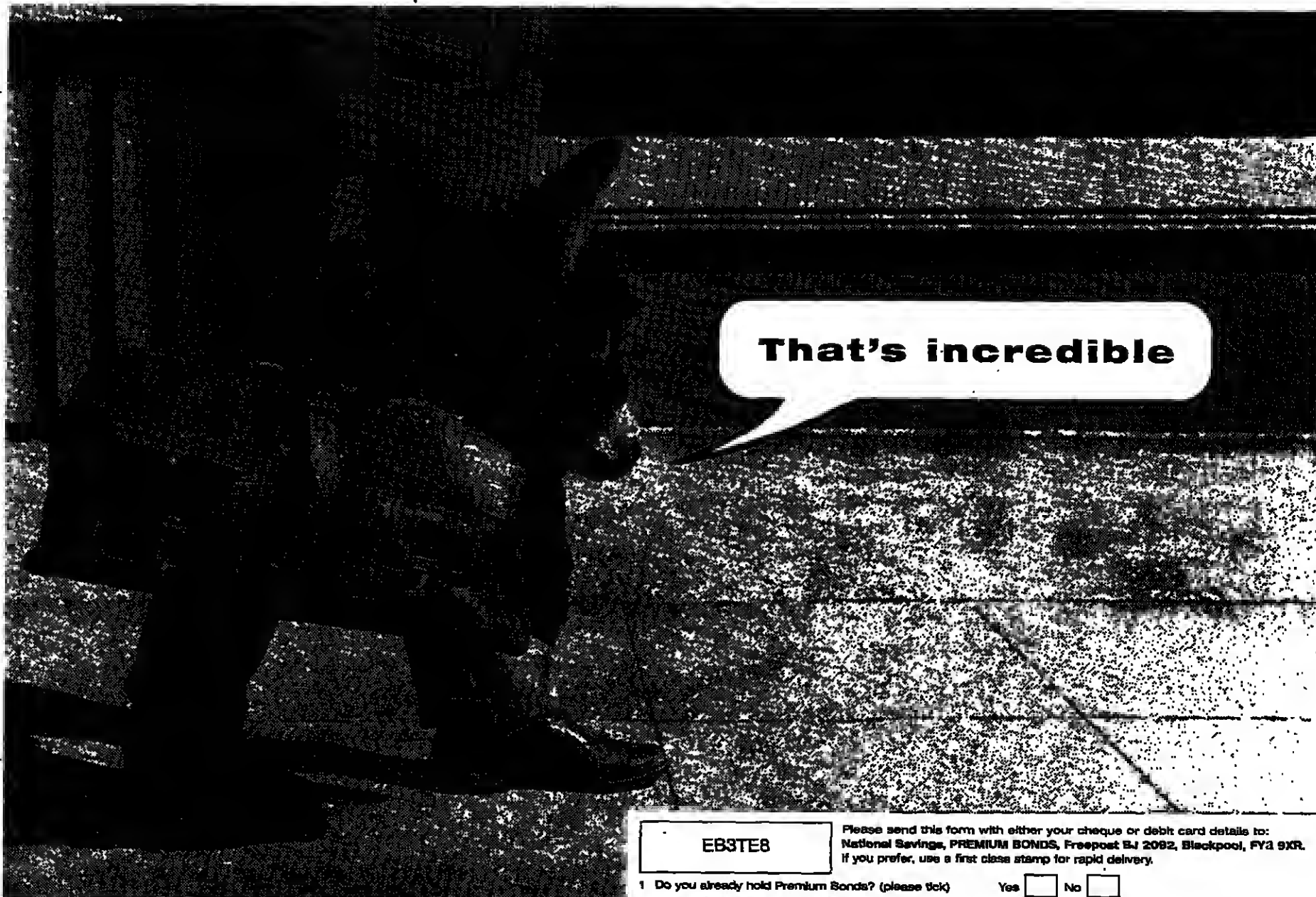


Triumph: Margrette, Venus and Celia Francisco yesterday after Tony Diedrick (right) was named as the killer of Joan (above right)



Main photograph: Reuters

Every month, someone wins a **MILLION POUNDS.**



SWIFTCALL

LOW COST INTERNATIONAL CALLS

10% DISCOUNT

Australia	18p	N. Zealand	27p
Germany	12p	Pakistan	72p
Hong Kong	27p	S. Africa	34p
India	50p	Thailand	72p
Ireland	10p	UK	5p
Japan	20p	USA	8p

Call us today for details on fantastic savings to hundreds of other destinations and how to open your pre-paid account.

0800 769 0033

Call 1800 794 581 if you are in Ireland
1800 836 5005 if you are in the USA

BUSINESS 0800 769 2222

The facts about Premium Bonds are pretty incredible.

This month, over half-a-million winners shared over £40 million in tax-free prizes.

The minimum investment is £100 and the maximum £20,000.

Over a period of time, a maximum holder can hope to win an average of 12 to 13 PRIZES A YEAR - and that's tax-free.

And what's more, you can get your money back whenever you want.

Make sure you get your application in by the end of March. Then your bonds will be in the May draw and every monthly draw after that. You can use the coupon or buy at your local post office.

Premium Bonds
The INCREDIBLE investment opportunity.

Any person aged 16 or over can buy Premium Bonds for themselves. Bonds can be bought for children under 16 by their parents, (great) grandparents or guardians. You should receive the Bond and a copy of the prospectus normally within three weeks. This advertisement is a simplified guide. The purchase date will be the date we receive your application with debit card details or cheque. Bonds go into prize draws one full calendar month after the month of purchase. Three months notice will be given to any changes to the prize structure or interest rate that makes up the prize fund. The Director of Savings reserves the right to seek evidence of identity.

EB3TE8

Please send this form with either your cheque or debit card details to:
National Savings, PREMIUM BONDS, Freepost BJ 2092, Blackpool, FY3 9XR.
If you prefer, use a first class stamp for rapid delivery.

1 Do you already hold Premium Bonds? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please enter your Holder's Number

2 Amount of this purchase (in words) pounds £

3 I enclose a cheque crossed "A/C Payee" and made payable to "NATIONAL SAVINGS (PREMIUM BONDS)".
(Please use Capital letters for this part of the cheque, and write your name and address on the back). OR
Please debit my Switch ☐ Delta ☐ (Please note, Bonds may only be bought in your name using your own SWITCH or DELTA debit card. Purchases for children under 16 should be made by cheque. NO CREDIT CARD PURCHASES ACCEPTED.)

Number

Start Date Expiry Date Issue number (Switch only)

4 I accept the purchase will be subject to the terms of the current Prospectus.
Signature Date

5 M Surname

All forenames

Address in full

Postcode Date of birth DAY MONTH YEAR

Telephone number (useful if there is a query)

6 If buying for a child under 16, give name of parent/guardian:

M Surname

All forenames

7 If buying for a (great) grandchild, give name of the parent/guardian above and your own name and address below.
M Surname

All forenames

Address in full

Postcode

This form cannot be used to purchase Premium Bonds at a post office.

NATIONAL SAVINGS



Bowled over: A man aiming for the spittoon during the Champagne Information Bureau's annual tasting at the Plaisterers' Hall in London yesterday; the UK is now the wine's largest export market. Photograph: Philip Meech

Police chiefs urge ban on cannabis seed sales

By Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

NEW LAWS to ban the sale of cannabis seed and dope-growing equipment are being urged by police chiefs, it was disclosed yesterday.

The Home Office is also being pressed to bring in legislation to introduce a new penalty forcing people caught in possession of cannabis to have anti-drug counselling. First-time users would be given a choice between being prosecuted or receiving a caution, plus some treatment.

Both ideas are being promoted by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in an attempt to clamp down on the use and availability of cannabis, which is the most popular drug in Britain.

There is concern about the an upsurge in the number of people growing cannabis at home in the past five years, particularly the strong "skunk" variety. Home-growers are ex-



Drugs tsar Keith Hellawell

plotting a legal loop-hole that allows them to buy cannabis seeds and the growing equipment legitimately from specialist shops and mail order.

The cultivation of cannabis plants is illegal, but not the sale or purchase of seeds. Many cultivators grow the drug for their own consumption, but others produce crops worth tens of thousands of pounds to sell.

Colin Phillips, Chief Con-

stable of Cumbria, and head of ACPO's drug committee, said he had raised the issue with Keith Hellawell, the new British "drugs tsar", and would be urging Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, to introduce a new offence of possession of seed and plant-growing equipment with the intention of cultivating cannabis.

He said: "A large number of shops, specialising in the supply of hydroponic (water culture) growing equipment, have emerged throughout the country... it is believed that some even supply small cuttings of cannabis plants. In addition, cannabis seed is supplied wholesale through various distributors nationwide. As the law stands there is no specific offence of either supplying cannabis seed or supplying hydroponic systems."

There are an estimated 500,000 illegal cannabis plants being grown in Britain. Seeds cost from £40 to £70 for a packet of 10, depending on variety. Growing equipment, which in-

cludes trays and a lighting system, starts at £75.

Mr Phillips is also keen for the Government to adopt a scheme known as "cannio plus", which is being piloted in a small number of voluntary projects including West Yorkshire and Bristol.

Under the system, anyone caught in possession of a small amount of cannabis on their first, second or possibly third time, is given the choice of receiving counselling as well as a caution. Chief constables believe this system should be made compulsory, although they acknowledge it would need a huge injection of extra cash to pay for treatment centres and counsellors.

The number of cautions given for possession of cannabis has increased almost tenfold in a decade, from 4,048 in 1986 to 40,391 by 1995.

Mr Phillips said that Home Office officials were "encouraging" about the proposals and that discussions were on-going.

Legalisation campaign rally

By Graham Ball

ON SATURDAY the cannabis debate takes to the streets of central London for the first time in 30 years. Supporters of the *Independent On Sunday's* campaign to decriminalise Britain's most popular illicit drug are travelling from all over the country to Hyde Park for a march through the capital and a rally in Trafalgar Square.

The march will be led by Labour MP Paul Flynn, who will be joined by the founder of Italy's Radical Party, Marco Pannella, a prominent campaigner for reform of European drug laws and MEPs from Belgium, Italy and France. Britain's most colourful cannabis campaigner Howard Marks is also to speak at the rally.

The police have issued a warning to motorists to avoid the Piccadilly and Park Lane area on Saturday afternoon. "We are expecting a crowd of between five and 16,000 marchers," a spokesman for the Metropolitan Police said.

One of the organisers of the last legalise-cannabis mass demonstration in London in

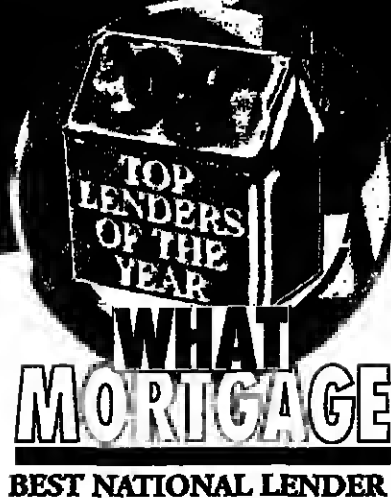
1968, Caroline Coon, will be among the marchers this Saturday. "I'm tremendously excited by this development," said Ms Coon, a writer and artist and one of the founders of the drug charity Release.

"I was one of the first London pot rally in 1967 and helped organise the one the following year but I think this is going to be bigger. The drug issue is more important today than it was 30 years ago because we have all seen how the so-called war against drugs is really a war against people," she said.

During the six months that the campaign to decriminalise cannabis has been running in the *IoS* it has attracted the support of many prominent figures in the arts and entertainment, medicine and academia. The neurophysiologist Professor Colin Blakemore, Martin Amis, Harold Pinter, Margaret Drabble, Damien Hirst and legal expert Professor Michael Zander are among the many who have signed the paper's petition.

Join Saturday's march at Reformers' Tree in Hyde Park, central London, at midday. Information on: 0181 964 2692.

Award WINNING mortgages from Nationwide



Naturally, we believe that our wide range of mortgages offers our customers outstanding value, both now and in the long term.

But the good news, from your point of view, is that the experts agree.

For the second year running, What Mortgage magazine has awarded us its prestigious Best National Lender award for outstanding long term value, while Your Mortgage magazine is equally

impressed, awarding Nationwide the Best Overall Lender title for 1997/98, in recognition of our excellent mortgages and high standards of service.

As the World's No.1 Building Society, we are committed to putting our customers' best interests first. With no dividends to pay to shareholders, we're free to ensure ongoing mortgage value, today and for as long as you stay with us. So, if you're looking for

excellent value both now and in the long term, it clearly pays to decide Nationwide.

So make it your No.1 priority to find out more by calling into your local branch, finding us on the Internet at www.nationwide.co.uk, or for an instant quote and decision in principle within an hour call 0800 30 20 10, quoting ref. IN99, (lines open 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm weekends).

It pays to decide...



The World's No.1 Building Society



putting members first

Typical example assumes a standard variable rate of 8.10% throughout the term of the loan. Rate correct at time of going to press. A couple (male and female), non-smokers, aged 25 applying for a £40,000 endowment mortgage over 25 years on a purchase price of £60,000. Monthly interest payments will be £249.75 net of MARS at 10%, AER 3.5% (variable). Total Amount Payable £121,455, which includes 300 mortgage interest payments, final repayment of capital, solicitor's mortgage costs of £100 excluding VAT (and assuming the same solicitor acts for both of us), a valuation fee of £175 which is refunded upon completion and redemption fees of £40. A typical monthly endowment premium is £64 (variable) which is not included in the monthly interest payment shown. For loans exceeding 75% of the purchase price or the valuation, whichever is the lower, an additional charge will be made. We charge a £25 administration fee if you do not insure your property through Nationwide Building Society. Nationwide Life Limited and Nationwide Unit Trust Managers Limited represent only the Nationwide Marketing Group which is regulated by the Personal Investment Authority for life assurance, pensions and unit trust products. Nationwide Unit Trust Managers Limited is also regulated by IMRO. Please note that for various legal, regulatory and customer service requirements, your call will be recorded. Mortgages are subject to status, valuation and security. Available to those aged 18 or over only. Written quotations available on request. Nationwide Building Society, Nationwide House, Peters Way, Swindon SN8 1NW.

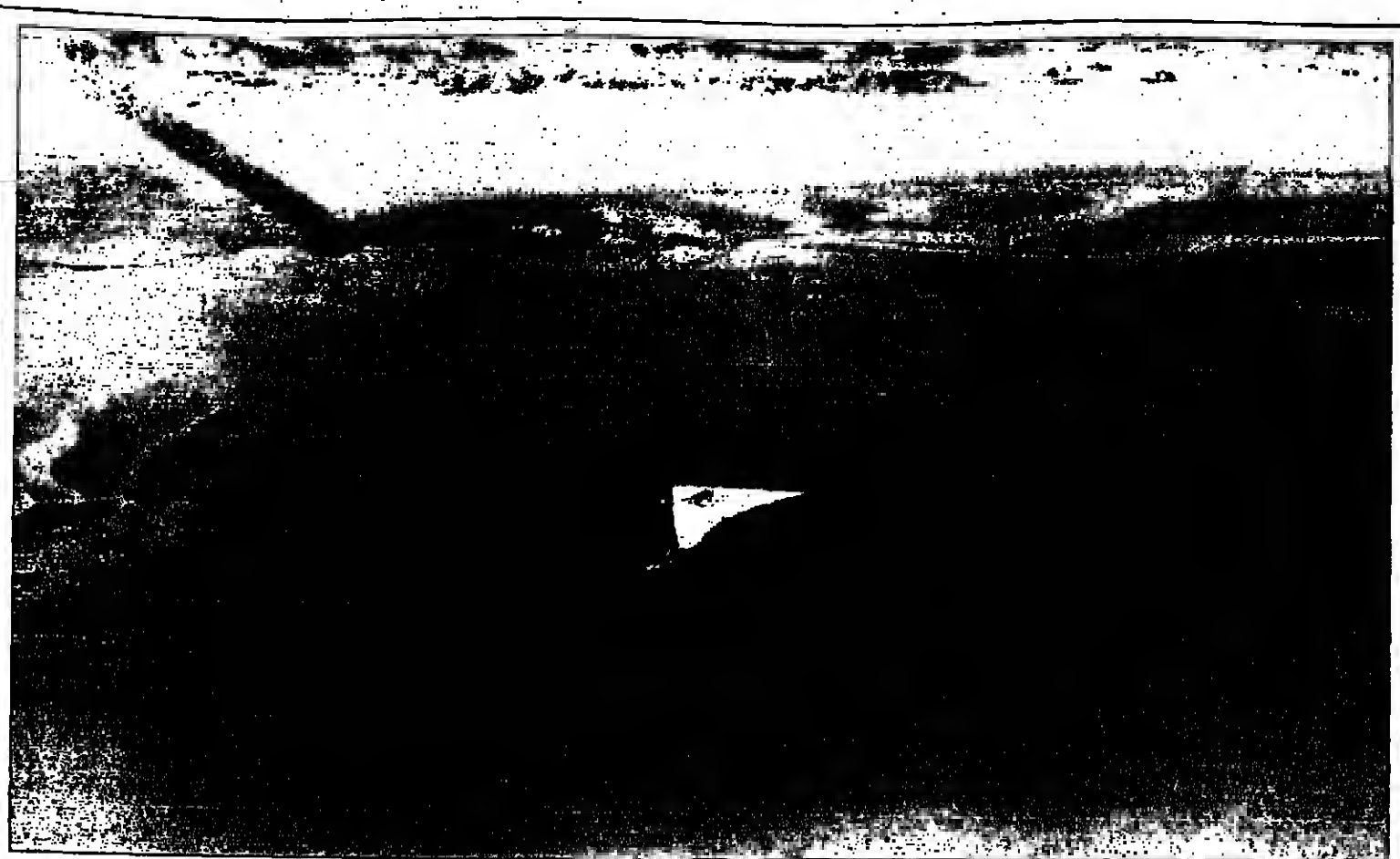
YOUR HOME IS AT RISK IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON A MORTGAGE OR OTHER LOAN SECURED ON IT.

OFFICIAL
SPONSOR
OF THE
FOOTBALL
LEAGUE



On Thursday 26th March 1998 The Independent will be publishing an 8 page report in association with WaterAid about the issues surrounding people's access to clean water and effective sanitation in the developing world.





Coastal approach: Brian Milton and Keith Reynolds coming in to land in France yesterday on the first leg of their journey Photograph: Andrew Buiman

Pilot in microlight convoy crashes in France

A ROUND-the-world attempt by two microlight pilots was marred by a serious accident yesterday when a colleague travelling in convoy was hurt in a crash.

Phil Good was preparing to fly back to Britain from Le Touquet on the French coast when his microlight crashed. He had flown across the English Channel with 33 other microlights accompanying Brian Milton and Keith Reynolds in *GT Global Flyer* which had set off earlier yesterday on the first leg of their journey from Brooklands Museum near Weybridge, Surrey, in an attempt to recreate the epic journey made by Phileas Fogg in Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Simon Newlyn, publicity director for *GT Global Flyer*, said: "The tragic accident happened at about 12.30pm GMT when Mr Good was starting his aircraft to return to England when it appeared to reach full revs and run out of control. The microlight hit another aircraft on the tarmac and crashed into an airport building."

One eyewitness at the airport said the microlight crashed through the windows of the passport-control building. Mr Good was taken to hospital after being treated for injuries on the airfield.

Headteachers attack parents over truancy

By Ben Russell
Education Correspondent

HEADTEACHERS yesterday called for legislation to outlaw parents from taking cheap term-time holidays as part of a crackdown on persistent truants.

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) also urged stern action against children who are continually late and said that it would back moves towards cutting child benefit from those parents who encouraged their children not to attend school.

David Hart, general secretary of the NAHT, said that late-ness for lessons and children being taken out of school for holidays eroded discipline and encouraged truancy. A union submission to ministers argues that both can foster a "tax attitude" to attending school.

Hart said it is essential to convince parents that "truancy equals poor results, leading to unemployment, crime and a wasted life". Estimates suggest that as many as a million children play truant at some time. Some are as young as seven.

Headteachers are hoping the Prime Minister's Social Exclusion Unit will back a hard line on truancy. The unit, set up to "think the unthinkable", is understood to have floated the idea of withdrawing child benefit as a way of bringing into line parents whose children play truant.

Mr Hart said that benefit cuts could be used as an alternative to prosecution in the rare cases where parents persistently fail to make sure their children go to school.

He said: "Parental duties must be tackled with as much vigour as parental rights. Far too often parents either connive at their children's truancy or fail to take seriously their children's exclusion from school."

He said new penalties should be considered to deal with what he called a hard core of parents who "actively encourage non-attendance".

From September, all parents and children will have to sign new home-school contracts, covering truancy, homework and general discipline.

But Mr Hart called for stronger action against parents who "arrogantly" take their children out of school. He said: "The Government must change the law and simply make it illegal for parents to take their children away from school during term time. That would send a strong message to parents that they are supposed to have their children at school."

Margaret Morrissey, spokeswoman for the National Association of Parent Teacher Associations, said parents would be helped if the heavy peak-time cost of travel was reduced. She said: "We really need to be getting together with the travel agents and all the people who make money out of parents at holiday time. We do not condone parents who take children out of school, but it can be understandable."

"What we would like to see is some support for parents who are failing to get their children to go to school."

The Government has committed £21m to initiatives designed to reduce truancy. Parents who fail to ensure that their children attend school already face fines of up to £1,000, but prosecutions are rare.

An Audit Commission study has shown that two-thirds of school-age offenders against the law are either excluded pupils or persistent truants.

Genetic-crop threat to wildlife survival

By Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

FIELDS of genetically engineered crops may lead to the starvation of wildlife, government advisers warned yesterday. Birds and insects could be deprived of the weeds and weed seeds which are an important food source.

The reason is that many of these crops are designed to be used with broad-spectrum herbicides which wipe out every kind of plant except the crop itself, which has been genetically modified to be resistant to the weedkiller.

The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment is concerned that when this revolutionary technology takes off, cereal fields and their borders will be even more weed-free than they are with modern intensive farming techniques. The committee's chairman, John Beringer, Professor of Molecular Genetics at Bristol University, said: "It could be cranking up the pressure on species if this technology proceeds to the limit."

The committee's job is to advise ministers on what genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, can safely be released for use in the environment. GMOs are created when genes from one plant or animal are shifted permanently into the DNA of another, creating varieties unlikely to arise in evolution or through ordinary breeding techniques.

Several companies are jostling to bring GMOs to Europe. The crops are widely grown in the United States, but in the European Union they face hurdles set up by the EU and by its member states. There have been many small trials, but the earliest that a GMO can legally be planted on a commercial basis will probably be next spring, or later. The front-runner is a modified oilseed rape owned by a Belgian company, Plant Genetic Systems.

The committee yesterday held its first press conference, on the publication of its fourth annual report, reflecting members' concern that the public is baffled and fearful about genetic engineering.

Professor Beringer said that the committee's main aim was not to endorse any GMO product which was more harmful than its ordinary equivalent.

The committee considers each application case by case. That meant it may miss the cumulative impact of many GMOs being approved and grown in Britain, he said, adding: "We ought to flag up things which could be a problem."



Bangkok



Comoros



Kuala Lumpur



Singapore



Melbourne



Manila



Jakarta



Hong Kong



Mumbai

Going there?

So is the Airline of the Year.

Emirates flies further than you think. Including destinations in Africa, the Far East and Australia.

So if you're heading for that part of the world, treat yourself to the world's best.



Emirates

AIRLINE OF THE YEAR 1998
EXECUTIVE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

OVER 100 INTERNATIONAL AWARDS, 44 INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS. CALL YOUR TRAVEL AGENT OR EMIRATES ON 0171 808 8808 (LON) OR 0101 437 5007 (MAN)
<http://www.emirates.com/>

DIRECT LINE INSTANT ACCESS ACCOUNT

UP TO **7.25%** GROSS.

Small space.
Big savings rate.

Balance	Annual Gross Rate*
£1 - £4,999	5.80%
£5,000 - £9,999	6.10%
£10,000 - £24,999	7.00%
£25,000 - £49,999	7.50%
£50,000 - £99,999	7.75%
£100,000+	7.75%

*All rates correct as 1st March 1998.

Call one of the numbers below and find out how you can earn up to 7.25% gross.

0161 667 1121	0161 833 1121	0141 221 1121
LONDON	MANCHESTER	GLASGOW

CALL ANYTIME from 9am Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm Saturday.
A Royal Bank of Scotland company. Please quote ref. IND123

Call recorded and monitored. Terms subject to variation. Deposits and withdrawals via your bank account. Allow 3 working days. Full terms and conditions of the account are available on request. Direct Line and the red telephone are trademarks of Direct Line Insurance plc, used with its permission.



Evans in bid for digital radio

By Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

THE rather dry world of digital radio was given an injection of life yesterday when it was announced that the unlikely bedfellows of Classic FM and Chris Evans were joining forces to apply for a digital radio licence.

Digital radio - known as DAB - will mean compact disc-quality sound coming out of radios which never crackle or lose their signal. It can broadcast text, graphics, pictures and information services and can talk to personal and laptop computers.

The Radio Authority advertised a national commercial digital licence yesterday that will give the winner 12 years to establish, in competition with the BBC, digital radio in the United Kingdom.

Chris Evans' Ginger Media Group has joined forces in the first bid to be announced with GWR, owners of Classic FM and a network of local radio stations. The bid was in the name of a new consortium, Digital One.

Richard Branson, a part-owner of Ginger Media Group, is expected to get involved in the bid.

Other radio groups, such as London's Capital and EMAP, are also expected to bid for the licence by the June deadline.


The Radio Authority wants whoever wins to encourage people to buy digital radios - currently retailing for more than £1,000 - so they can be mass-produced and the price will fall.

informative:

With effect from 1 April 1998:

The fee for returning cheques, standing orders and direct debits unpaid, due to the lack of funds or available overdraft will be increased from £30 to £35 per item.

The Excess Overdraft Fee will be increased from £7.50 to £8.50.



first direct

First Direct is a division of Midland Bank plc. Member HSBC Group

Blacks still facing hard times in Liverpool's own form of apartheid

By Kim Sengupta

THE PUB at Liverpool dockside is for the mainly black clientele. "They generally kept together, the poor fellows, because they were at a disadvantage singly, and liable to slights in neighbouring streets," a police chief told a visiting writer from London.

That was in 1861, and the writer was Charles Dickens. When Anthony Bevis, *The Independent's* political editor, reported from his native city in 1989, a huge number of the pubs were still segregated and the police, many local blacks would say, were a lot less sympathetic.

The *Independent's* investigation into community relations in Liverpool followed a damning report by Lord Gifford who found that racial discrimination in Liverpool was "uniquely horrific." Mr Bevis concluded that the city practised "its own unique brand of apartheid," and the population, including some blacks, close their mind to this fact.

Nine years on, Tony Blair stated his commitment to a multicultural Britain. But the city his wife, Cherie, was born and raised in remains divided and full of distrust.

There are people who say little has changed. Liverpool, which has the oldest residential black population in the country, has just one black councillor out of 99, and just 0.3 per cent of local authority employees is estimated to be black. In 1996, a survey by the University of Liverpool suggested that one in every two members of the area's ethnic population had suffered racial abuse.

Just a mile from the predominantly black area of Toxteth is the city centre where it is highly unusual to see a black person serving at the stores, or working in offices.

Over the years, Liverpool has built up a reputation as a place of racial tolerance and harmony. That, say black activists, is a mirage. The city had effectively operated a policy of segregation punctuated by outbreaks of violence. In 1919 and in 1948 there were race riots. Blacks were kept out of the better jobs and lived in areas with the worst housing.

In 1984, the Commission for Racial Equality reported systematic discrimination in the city council's housing policy. Five years later, the CRE issued a formal non-discrimination notice against the council because nothing had been done.

The discrimination had continued during Militant's stormy stewardship of the city. In fact, Derek Hatton and his comrades were vehemently opposed to any form of special help being given to the ethnic minorities because they claimed it would lead to a white backlash and weaken working-class solidarity.

This working-class solidarity does not extend to white residents accepting blacks as their neighbours

in the better off working-class areas, say pressure groups. The best of the council and Housing Trust properties is in the north of the city, and few black families who moved there from the south have managed to settle, most driven out by harassment.

At the Liverpool 8 Law Centre, which grew out of the Liverpool 8 Defence Committee following the Toxteth riots, co-ordinator Maria O'Reilly, said: "There are parts of north Liverpool where black people

would not go alone after dark because they would be attacked and may even be killed. This is not melodramatic, you do find black dead bodies there and no one knows what had happened. Black families who have moved there also face a lot of harassment. What has improved in the last nine years? Next to nothing. Liverpool is a deeply racist city with its own form of apartheid. It's a strange situation, white Liverpool people deconstruct apartheid in

South Africa, yet fail to see a problem here. No wonder black people feel that they don't matter in the eyes of the authorities."

The feeling of disenchantment and hopelessness is felt acutely in the streets of Toxteth. Granby Street was once a busy mixture of residential housing and shops. Now it lies virtually deserted with shattered shops, empty homes and the rubble of pulled down buildings.

The Granby Street project is part

Empty promises: Stephen Nze in Granby Street, Toxteth, once a vibrant mixture of residential homes and shops, now virtually deserted, with shops boarded up and many buildings pulled down

Photograph
Martin Rickett/Newsman

of a council redevelopment operation, but locals claim they had not been properly consulted, and the community does not want to be dispersed in this fashion.

Stephen Nze said: "It just shows the contempt they have for people around here. They would not behave like this towards white people in north Liverpool. In their eyes, our opinion isn't worth anything. Heseline poured a lot of money in but what happened to it?"

Academics and other experts maintain that black pressure groups are wrong to state that their views are totally ignored. Gideon Bevis, a councillor and university reader, said: "The ethnic minorities now do have greater access to channels to the authorities, so in that respect things have improved, although they are far from perfect."

Anne Wright, equality manager at Liverpool City Council, stressed that the council was not sanguine about the situation. She pointed out that a number of measures have been taken to further racial equality, adding: "We know there is a major problem, and it is not something we are taking lightly."

Lawrence inquiry told of catalogue of police blunders

By Kathy Marks

POLICE investigating the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence were given the names of the five main suspects within 24 hours but failed to arrest them until a fortnight later, the judicial inquiry into his death was told yesterday.

That decision was described as "seriously flawed" by Edmund Lawson, QC, the government-appointed counsel to the inquiry, who used the first day of the hearing to deliver a blistering critique of the conduct of the police investigation. Mr Lawson highlighted examples of alleged incompetence at every stage, including the "crass" failure of a surveillance photographer to report two incidents of bags being removed from the home of two suspects - bags which, he said, might have contained bloodstained clothing.

The inquiry, ordered by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, is examining issues arising from the death of Stephen, 18, who was stabbed by a white gang at a bus stop in Eltham, south-east London, five years ago. Mr Lawson's criticisms were echoed by Michael Mansfield, QC, counsel for the Lawrence family, who said the identities of the five white youths were repeated to detectives by 26 different sources - including three police officers - in the two weeks before the arrests.

The suspects, members of a local gang, were named in telephone calls to the incident room and in anonymous letters as being involved in Stephen's murder as well as in a recent spate of racist killings and attacks to the area. Charges against the five youths - Neil and Jamie Acourt, Gary Dobson,

David Norris and Luke Knight - were all dropped before trial, and a private prosecution taken out by Stephen's parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence, was also unsuccessful. The inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, plans to call the five to give evidence.

Delivering his opening speech, with Mr and Mrs Lawrence at his side, Mr Mansfield said the investigation had been undermined from the start by racism. "The magnitude of the failure in this case cannot



Stephen Lawrence: Stabbed by a gang of white youths

be explained by mere incompetence, or a lack of direction by senior officers, or a lack of execution by junior officers, or by woeful under-resourcing.

"So much was missed by so many that deeper causes and forces must be considered. The forces relate to two main propositions. One, that the victim was black, and that there was as a result a racism, conscious and unconscious, that permeated the investigation. Two, the fact that the perpetrators were white and were expecting some form of protection." Mr Mansfield

He said it was incredible, given that 56 officers were assigned to the case on the first night, that - he alleged - there was no systematic search of the area and witnesses were not properly debriefed.

Pursuing the theme of racial disharmony, Mr Mansfield quoted from a statement that Mrs Lawrence is to make to the inquiry today. In it, she says: "Stephen was well-loved and, had he been given the chance to survive, maybe he would have been the one to bridge the gap between black and white. Because he did not distinguish between black and white; he saw people as people."

For his part, Mr Lawson was particularly scathing about the "inexcusable" failure of officers to act on early tip-offs, and the resulting delays before identity parades were held and suspects' houses were searched. "It appears that in a number of material respects, the police conduct of the investigation went badly wrong," he said. "Why weren't those arrests and searches carried out much, much more quickly? The police, if they can, must answer the indictment of delay."

A catalogue of police errors listed by Mr Lawson included their alleged failure to administer first aid to Stephen at the scene, to liaise sensitively with his family or to deal appropriately with important witnesses such as Duwayne Brooks, Stephen's friend. Forensic evidence such as a bloodstained shoe was lost, he said.

Dramatic twist to trial by TV

By Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

ONCE to watch TV actors play out a courtroom drama in front of a jury of real people you had to be taking a sickie. The three day format of Crown Court in the Seventies meant people often extended their sick leave after they were well so they could see the verdict from fictitious Fulchester on a Friday afternoon.

But now it is back and you won't have to lie to your boss. This summer ITV is resurrecting the Crown Court format in

Accused, a new, weekly hour-long courtroom drama that will air in the evening peak time. Actors will again play the defence, prosecution, witnesses and judges, while members of the public will form the jury, and come to an unscripted verdict.

ITV announced the new show in its Spring and Summer season launch yesterday and hinted that the viewing figures for the Louise Woodward trial had influenced its thinking.

"There is scope for a courtroom drama in peak time," said David Liddiment, ITV's director of programming. "The

idea of using members of the public for the jury has always been an attractive idea. Crown Court used to have fantastic writers and powerful stories and I want this to be a modern drama with really contemporary stories."

Mr Liddiment said that using real people in a jury was the closest television could come to Court TV in America which attracts big audiences for trials. In the UK, satellite channel Sky News quadrupled its viewing figures when it followed the Woodward trial.

Dixons

UP-2-YOU

MOBILE PAYPHONE FROM **one 2 one**



PRICE CHECK
 Every week we check the prices of hundreds of products in the national press to make sure that Dixons Price Check prices can't be beaten!

NO BILLS

NO CREDIT CHECK

NO CONTRACT

NO CONNECTION FEE

CONTROL WHAT YOU SPEND WITH CALL VOUCHERS

MOTOROLA MEMPHIS

DIGITAL MOBILE PHONE

- Up to 300 minutes talktime/70 hours standby time.
- 99 name and number memory.
- Charging time 90 minutes.
- Can operate on standard AA batteries for a limited time.

INCLUDES

£10 CALL VOUCHER

PACKAGE PRICE

£129.99

*A minimum of £20 has to be credited to account every 90 days.

PRICE CHECKED

Dixons

There's a Great Deal going on

one 2 one

UP-2-YOU

- 85% of Great Britain's population now covered.
- Unlimited 10p per minute.
- Other calls 50p per minute.
- Calls to non-One 2 One mobiles 75p per minute.
- Package available on selected phones.
- See your local store for more details.

*If you find the same product cheaper locally please let us know immediately, we will be pleased to refund the difference. Just notify us within 7 days of purchase. The product must be new, complete and suitable for immediate delivery. Mail order prices excluded.

مكتبة الادب

British Gas
Home

23



British Gas will soon be supplying electricity as well as your gas. So if you change to monthly direct debit for your gas and buy your electricity from us, you could see savings of up to £123 on your combined bills.

To find out what you could save call 0845 123 600.

Gas savings: Our monthly direct debit compared to our cash/cheque paid later than 10 days (32,237 kWh annual consumption). Electricity: Public electricity suppliers average direct debit prices compared to British Gas (5,240 kWh annual consumption). Savings vary according to consumption.

French right salutes 'Le Blairisme'

By John Lichfield
in Paris

It was a speech with something for everyone but one which delighted most of all, the beleaguered French centre-right. Tony Blair's speech to the National Assembly in Paris yesterday had gone through several drafts. The Prime Minister apparently wanted it to be a significant speech, not just a piece of rhetorical wall-paper.

His account of the Blairist "third way" was applauded, cheered and whooped by parliamentarians of the French right. It was received at best politely, and for long passages in si-

lence, by the Socialist and Communist deputies. Mr Blair, speaking in convincing French, made something of an ideological *faux pas* at the beginning of his 35-minute speech with a joking reminiscence of his student days in Paris. When he worked in the French capital as a waiter 25 years ago, the Prime Minister recalled, he was supposed to put all his tips in a common pot. It was a couple of weeks before he realised that he was the only person doing so. "It was my first lesson in applied socialism".

There was thunderous applause from Gaullist and liberal deputies; a deafening and stony-faced silence

on the left side of the hemicycle. Jokes about Socialism may be fine in Blairist New Britain but the ideal and the word - if not the practice - are still treated with reverence on the French left. His appeal for the "re-founding" of the friendship between Britain and France was sincerely meant, according to someone who worked on the various drafts. Mr Blair called for the 90-year-old Entente Cordiale to be recreated as "une entente réelle, une entente profonde" (a real understanding, a deep understanding).

The specifics of what this might mean were a little thin. Mr Blair and the French Socialist prime minister,

Lionel Jospin, are to set up a joint task-force to study ways of helping small businesses. Mr Blair urged the rapid creation of a permanent French-British military rapid-deployment force. This is an interesting idea but has been under discussion in Paris and London for several years. On Europe, there were many words to satisfy the most pro-European French politicians. Britain will be "prepared" to join the euro, "do not doubt that", when the "clear and unambiguous" economic facts made it economically sensible for Britain to join. Mr Blair called for more European integration to protect the environment and

to fight crime and drugs. He also called for the reform of the EU to give it a stronger political dimension - "a political commitment to community" - which is also a French pre-occupation.

But in a passage which might have fallen out of a *Sun* editorial, he rejected a "Europe of conformity" and any EU move to harmonise education, health personal taxes, culture and identity. Fortunately, no such EU proposals exist. But what turned into the most controversial section of the speech was the long, seemingly straightforward central passage defending New Labourism, Blairism and the "third way" between

interventionist Socialism and free-market capitalism. There was little here that Mr Blair had not said a hundred times before, in Britain.

Blairism was, he said, "an attempt to make realistic sense of the modern world. It is a world in which love of ideals is essential but addition to ideology can be fatal... there are no ideological preconditions, no pre-determined veto on means. What counts is what works..."

These words brought cheers and wild applause from the centre-right deputies and silence from the Socialists, Greens and Communists who form the Jospin government. Mr Blair and his speechwriters

had perhaps forgotten the extent to which "Le Blairisme" has become a weapon by the French right to assault the allegedly antidivine French left. Mr Blair's words were, a perfectly reasonable defence of New Labour: but in the French context, they were heard by both sides as an implied criticism of the Jospin administration. Mr Blair had the good sense - and the good French - to interject at this stage: "And the prescot [Socialist-led] French government is managing the economy very well."

He received a standing ovation from deputies of all political persuasions at the end.

School swot with a taste for danger

THE team of tough-minded Russian wheeler-dealers whom the West is so fond of calling young reformers is not entirely dull. One is cheerfully fond of allegations that he was - horror of horrors - witness to a striptease. Five others are smarting after being caught in a dodgy book deal.

But Sergei Kiriyenko, Russia's acting prime minister, looks like the genuine article, an earnest technocrat who has quietly, cleanly and calculatedly climbed up the ladder into one of the top jobs at the age of 35.

Mr Kiriyenko was a freshman cabinet minister until Monday, when he was ushered into the limelight with the startled air of a school swot who has - against all the odds - won the hammer throwing competition. No one in Moscow foresaw him as Boris Yeltsin's choice to replace Viktor Chernomyrdin, whom the Russian President dismissed on Monday along with Anatoly Chubais - the guru of the market-orientated reformers - and the Interior Minister, Anatoly Kudikov.

Although an obscure figure, some of Mr Kiriyenko's traits are clear enough. Balding and bespectacled, he looks like a kindly bank clerk. But he has a gift for making powerful allies. The biggest name in his address book: Boris Nemtsov, the glitzy governor whom Boris Yeltsin made First Deputy Prime Minister nearly a year

ago. But he also has ties with Mr Chubais, with whom he fought side-by-side to persuade diehard federal ministries to bring Russia's vast energy subsidies under control.

Crucially, the oil and media magnate Boris Berezovsky - one of Russia's tiny clique of kingmakers - is said to be on his side. Mr Kiriyenko was one of the first friends Mr Nemtsov invited to Moscow after his own promotion, completing a journey that began years earlier in the provinces.

After school in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, the Georgian-born Kiriyenko - the son of a professor - set about a textbook Soviet career path. He graduated from a ship-building institute in Gorki, and then moved to Nizhny Novgorod where he became a leader of the Komsomol, the organisation for young Communists. After a brief flirtation with banking, he went into the oil business, becoming head of a regional refinery, before moving to the energy ministry as Mr Nemtsov's protégé.

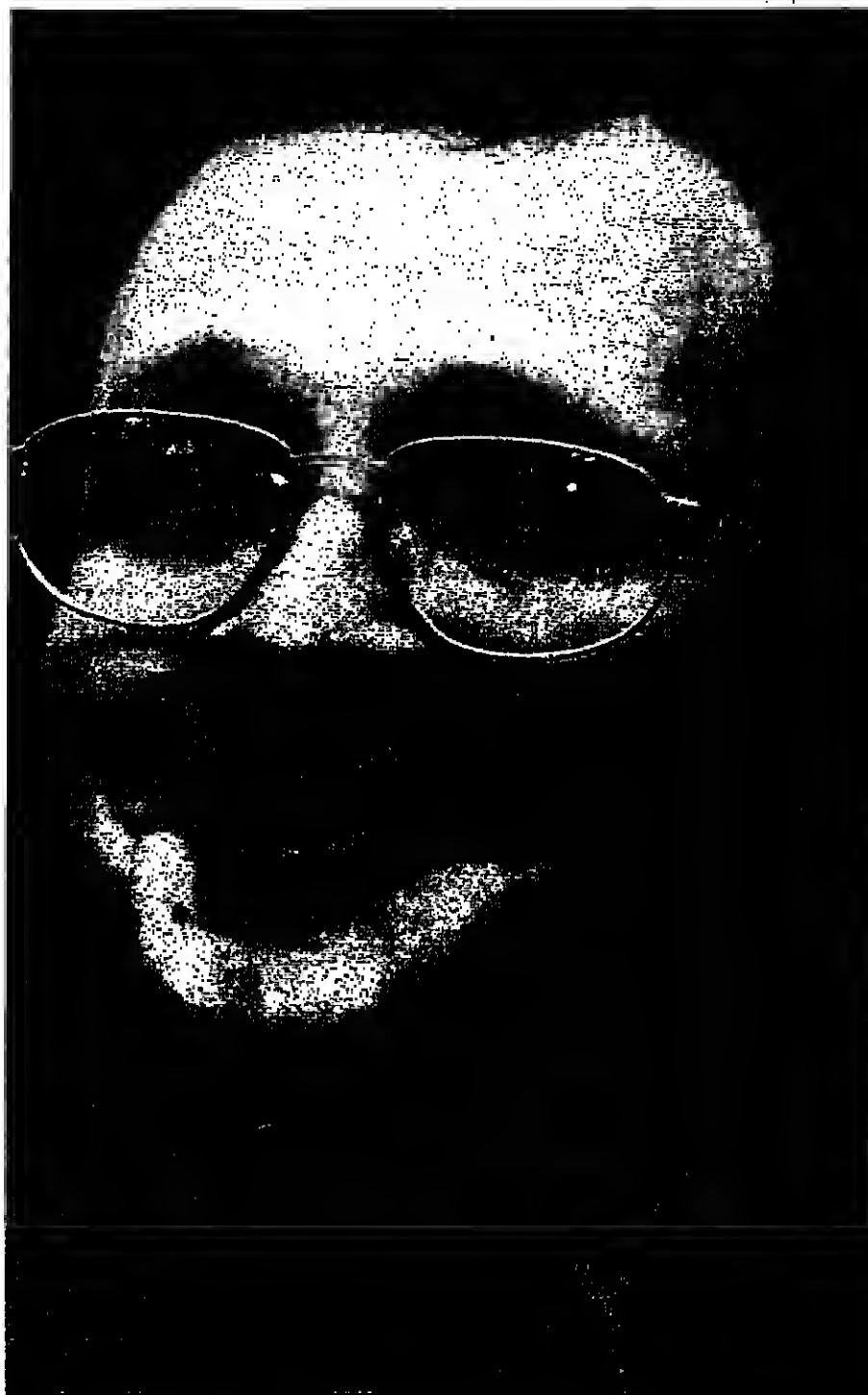
Once in Moscow, he fired up his pro-market leanings by pushing forward with plans

for state self-offs, notably Rosneft, and freeing industrial giants from their overwhelming social welfare obligations, such as schools, shops, and kindergartens for their employees' families. In November, he took over from Mr Nemtsov as head of the Fuel and Energy Ministry responsible for the engine room of Russia's shrunken economy - the oil companies, and the natural gas monopoly Gazprom. His new acquaintances in Moscow found him pragmatic, even-tempered, but determined.

It remains to be seen whether Mr Kiriyenko is a blip on the screen, or will play a larger role in Russia's history. He has been asked to name a cabinet in a week, though Boris Yeltsin will have the final say. His appointment is subject to the approval of the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, whose powerful Communist lobby is already grumbling.

He is - sources say - fond of risky sports such as pot-holing and mountain climbing. This is an advantage. To survive the job he must be able to weather intrigues, in and out of the Kremlin: battle corruption, hack a path through a legal quagmire, and appease a frustrated public.

"The Government has been thrown out, but we are still cold and hungry," demonstrators in Vladivostok complained yesterday.



Sergei Kiriyenko: Mild-mannered appearance, powerful allies

Photograph: Reuters

Yeltsin fires second cannonade at aides

A DAY after being plucked from obscurity to become acting prime minister of a huge and restless nuclear power, Sergei Kiriyenko, yesterday began work in forming a government - without knowing for sure whether his own job is permanent, writes Phil Reeves.

As he did so, Boris Yeltsin fired off a second cannonade in his eccentric campaign to prove to his countrymen and the

world that he remains in charge of Russia, despite his ailments and the struggling economy.

In a cameo performance on television one day after dismissing his entire government, including premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, the 67-year-old President turned his fire on his own aides. "We must create an environment in which everyone knows and feels that a failure to fulfil orders means death," he

said. "You will have immediately to submit your resignation."

Mr Yeltsin's latest flourish of the axe through the ranks of his team was clearly timed. On 9 April, the Communist opposition plans mass demonstrations to call for the removal of the government, and to protest at Russia's vast wages and pension arrears and economic disarray. But it also belongs to his broad ambition to win a place in his-

tory as a reformer. Tomorrow, he hopes to bask anew in the international limelight by hosting a summit with French president Jacques Chirac, and Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor. The little-known Mr Kiriyenko, 35, has been given a week by Mr Yeltsin to form a government. But although he fired them all, Mr Yeltsin has already indicated that he does not intend to dispense with

many ministers beyond Mr Chernomyrdin, his leading market reformer Anatoly Chubais and the interior minister, Anatoly Kudikov. The jobs of two key players - foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov, and defence minister Sergei Sergeyev - are considered safe.

Whether Mr Kiriyenko becomes prime minister remains uncertain. A political novice, with only a three-month stint as

fuel and energy minister under his belt, Mr Kiriyenko may have been chosen by Mr Yeltsin as a bargaining chip in negotiations over the next premier with parliament. The Russian press has been seething with speculation. Among those tipped are the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, first deputy prime minister, Boris Nemtsov, and Ivan Rytkin, minister for Commonwealth affairs.

"I wanted to help children and run my own business. Kumon allows me to combine the two"



William Whitlam, Former Stockbroker

Due to demand throughout the UK, Kumon is looking for enthusiastic individuals to run study centres in their local areas.

- Flexible, part-time work
- An opportunity to build your business
- The support of the world-leader in this field. Kumon has over 2.5 million students worldwide
- No ceiling on success
- Complementary to school work
- Suitable for children of all ages and abilities
- Clear focus on foundation skills; promotes self-discipline and good study skills

For a free information pack contact Stephen Ward on 0181 447 9010. Introductory Meetings are held regularly at selected locations across the UK.

KUMON MATHS

KUMON EDUCATIONAL UK, 5th FLOOR, THE GRANGE, 100 HIGH STREET, SOUTHGATE, LONDON N14 6ES
TEL: 0181 447 9010. FAX: 0181 447 9030.

Green Flag
Motoring Assistance

IF WE DON'T REACH YOU WITHIN AN HOUR, WE'LL GIVE YOU £100. THE AA AND RAC WON'T.

How's this for speed? In average, Green Flag reach you in just 35 minutes.
How's this for cost? Cover starts from only £29.50 per annum.
That's faster and cheaper than the AA and RAC. They can't beat us. So join us.

<http://www.greenflag.co.uk>

CALL FREE TODAY ON 0800 001 353

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi and Jose Ramos Horta

ASEM II - THE ALTERNATIVE STATE RECEPTION FOR THE UNREPRESENTED PEOPLES OF ASIA

hosted by

Joanna Lumley

The Royal Institution, 21 Albermarle Street, London W1

Open 10pm Thursday 2nd April 1998

Wine and canapés will be served

ASEM II in London on 3-4 April is a Heads of State meeting to promote trade and investment between Asia and Europe. Millions of people are suffering human rights abuses and oppression in Asia and yet they have no voice at ASEM II. The Alternative State Reception will highlight these issues and give a voice to the Unrepresented Peoples of Asia. Guest speakers will include three Nobel Peace Prize Winners: Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor and, on video, His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. Free Tibet Campaign, Burma Action Group, British Coalition for East Timor, Tapol, National Women's Network and the Philippine Resource Centre have worked together to organise this inspiring occasion for Peace, Freedom and Democracy.

Tickets are available for a minimum donation of £25. Donations to these non-profit making voluntary organisations will be very gratefully received and used to support Peace, Freedom and Democracy. Telephone 0171 359 7573 for more information.

Demonstrate: 'ASEM: Put People First'. Saturday 4 April, 11am Jubilee Gardens, or Waterloo. Rally: Trafalgar Square, 1.30pm.

BURMA Action Group UK
Free Tibet CAMPAIGN
PHILIPPINE Resource Centre
tapol The National Women's Network

Please send me _____ tickets for the Alternative State Reception.
I enclose £_____ (minimum donation £25 per ticket).
I would like to make a donation. I enclose a cheque/PO for: £200 ☐ £100 ☐ £50 ☐ £25 ☐ Other £_____
or Please debit my Access/ Visa/ Mastercard (Delete as appropriate)
Name _____
Address _____
Postcode _____ Telephone _____
Card Number _____
Expiry Date _____
Signature _____ Date _____
Please make cheques payable to Free Tibet Campaign, and post to 9 Islington Green, London N1 2XH. Credit card orders can also be made on 0171 359 7573, or faxed to 0171 354 1026.

Sponsored by The **INDEPENDENT**

سكيا بن الاميل

صكنا من الاجل

me'

vo's war
osts and
pers

news the Dalai Lama
ing San Sun Kyi
ose Ramos Horta
oanna Lumley

Free Tibet

This bit
of Southampton
has been
improved
by Mark Allen
who gets
his car
properly tuned
which reduces
pollution and helps
fight
global warming.

Keeping your car properly tuned is just one of the ways you can save on fuel consumption. For more ideas on how to fight global warming send this coupon to: Are you doing your bit? PO Box 200, Stratford-on-Avon CV37 9BR or call 0345 86 86 86.



Going for Green Name (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms):

Address

Postcode

are you doing your bit?

Ref: TIGCI

Hollywood star gives hope to Tibetans

Peter Popham sees Richard Gere lend a sympathetic ear at Delhi's Speaker's Corner

RICHARD GERE descended on a dusty, fly-blown wedge of central Delhi on Monday to bestow his blessings on six very hungry Tibetans.

It's a place called Jantar Mantar and it is desperately in need of blessings of every kind. Marooned between the concrete towers of the city offices, a five-star hotel and a park, it is a concentration of Asian miseries and grievances of every description. The six Tibetans, fasting indefinitely in an attempt to goad the United Nations into taking action over their brutalized homeland, are just one fragment of it.

If you made Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park a permanent event and married it with a squatter's camp, you would end up with something like Jantar Mantar. Tents of PVC and sacking moored to railings occupy half the pavement. Office workers pick their way along the portion that remains while naked children play tag and mothers hang washing on lines strung between traffic signs. Six hundred people squat here, Sikh families whose homes were destroyed and lives threatened in the riots of 1984 that followed the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

Further along the pavement is the saddest spot in Jantar Mantar: an elderly Tibetan woman called Sonam Dickey sits cross-legged with a portrait of her son, a musician, in her lap, tears coursing down her face. He was imprisoned by the Chinese for espionage, and is serving an 18-year prison term. "A MOTHER'S APPEAL" reads the sign behind her, asking for help to bring his release. "I would like to meet my son once before my death."

The Tibetans on hunger strike occupy a tent in what used to be the small public park here. The grass is all gone; all that is left is dust, flies and worry. Causes, some more hopeless than others. The walls of a shack are decorated with maps illustrating with arrows how the subcontinent should be unified. A long written scroll painted on a board urges world government.

These are the giantists, the men with big ideas. Across the way are four men who have been sitting on a carpet here for 1,309 days demanding the creation of a new state called U-tarakhand out of the north of Uttar Pradesh. This is, in fact, one of the few specific promises in the new government's National Agenda, but after 1,309 days these militants are not taking chances. "We will continue to struggle, we stay here until it happens," one said.

Inside the Tibetans' tent there is an altar with white silk shawls, flowers, slabs of butter and a picture of the Dalai Lama. Until Monday, this tent was just another speck of hopeless hope. But then Richard Gere came, the serious Buddhist who has made India his second home, the walking antithesis of the Hollywood dabbler. In a sharp black suit and gleaming white shirt, the sandalwood talisman round his wrist the only clue to his spiritual leanings, he put his hands together in greeting and the reporters' long wait for him was instantly forgiven.

He bent an ear to all six of the strikers, the youngest, a 25-year-old artist called Karma Sichoe, the oldest, Kumsang, a 70-year-old labourer, the only woman, 68-year-old Palzom, whose family died under the Chinese occupation, one son of starvation. The UN in Delhi confirmed that the strikers' demands - for a new debate on Tibet, for the dispatch of a special envoy there and investigation into human rights violations - had been forwarded to New York. Morale got a tremendous boost. Next day the euphoria was gone. The grim lassitude was back: this was the 15th day of the strike. Two earlier hunger strikes had been called off without result; this time they were determined to go all the way.

Earlier hunger strikes had been called off after the Dalai Lama intervened: Buddhism opposes the taking of all life, including one's own, so a "fast-unto-death" poses a moral problem. This time, however, they have petitioned the Dalai Lama to stay out of it, arguing the cause justified the sacrifice; and if no word comes from the UN, they are determined to go all the way.

Outside the park, meanwhile, in her sad little tent by the railings, Sonam Dickey waited with ever-diminishing optimism for one final meeting with her son.



Protest: Sonam Dickey pleading in New Delhi for the release of her son, who is being held in a Tibetan prison

Photograph: Tenzin Dorjee

Buddhist monk's VIP treatment

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's royal family has ordered the military to fly the country's most popular Buddhist monk to a Bangkok hospital for treatment of his heart ailment.

Luang Phor Khooon has been in hospital in the rural town of Nakhon Ratchasima, 130 miles north-east of Bangkok, since last Thursday.

Luang Phor Khooon has gained a wide following because people believe that if he hits them on the head with a rolled-up newspaper, they have a better chance of winning the state lottery.

The monk's blessing and endorsement is sought by many Thai politicians.

Doctors said that the monk would be flown by an army helicopter to Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok as soon as he was well enough to be moved.

Luang Phor Khooon was quoted in the Bangkok Post as saying that he wanted to live long enough to see the school and hospital projects that he is sponsoring completed.

"If I die now, nobody will carry on," the Post quoted the monk as saying. "So I will live."

ONLY ONE
PERSON
IN THE WORLD
SHOULD
READ THIS.

Taliban edict forces out UN

THE UN shut operations in southern Afghanistan following attacks on UN staff and an edict forcing foreign Muslim women working in Afghanistan to be accompanied by a close male relative. This is the first time the UN has taken such a drastic step in response to Afghanistan's Taliban army, which controls roughly 85 per cent of the country. — AP, Islamabad

East Europe hit by TB

TUBERCULOSIS was increasing in Russia and Central and East Europe, the World Health Organisation said in a report released on World Tuberculosis Day. Cases rose by 25 per cent in 1996 compared with 1994. In Russia, with 111,000 cases, the rate was 75 cases per 100,000, compared with six per 100,000 in relatively unaffected Sweden. — Reuters, Copenhagen

Apes face fire extinction

THE UN Development Programme is to mobilise 1,000 volunteers to fight forest fires in Borneo that are threatening a national park. News reports said orangutans face extinction in the area because of fires and hunting. — AP, Jakarta

Slings a lot

THAI authorities seized 4,000 live snakes packed into crates and shipped to China for use as food and medicine. They were rescued while the crates were being loaded into a plane. The snakes could have earned the smuggler as much as £20,000. Snakes are protected in Thailand. — AP, Bangkok

Which is exactly what happens when you send a mailshot. You know what you want to say and you know who you want to send it to. And that's the beauty of direct mail. Short of dropping in for a chat, it's one of the best ways to get your message across because you can make it as personal as you want. It'll be the first step in helping a small business like yours to grow and increase its profits. Just fill in the coupon or call us free on 0800 11 44 44 and we'll send you our Royal Mail information pack. Naturally, that'll be for your eyes only.

PLEASE SEND ME A FREE MAILSHOT INFORMATION PACK FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Name _____ Job Title _____

Company Name _____ Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Nature of Business _____

Number of Employees _____

Please return to: Royal Mail, Direct Mail Promotion, FREEPOST, ROSS-ON-WYE, Herefordshire HR9 7FR. Royal Mail may use these details to send you information on other interesting products and offers in the future. If you do not wish to receive this material please indicate this by placing a tick in the box. ☐ ONE203



WORLD COVER



Worth a trip to Ireland

Carlo Gebler agrees there are too many Irish versions of classic plays, writes Robert Hanks, but nowhere else would do for his production of *The Dance of Death*

JUST what we need: another Irish version of a European classic. In recent years we have been offered Irish Sophocles, Irish Aeschylus, Irish Chekhov – what seems like an awful lot of Irish Chekhov – Irish Lorea and Irish Ibsen. Anybody who wants to foist an Irish Strindberg on a paying audience needs a pretty good excuse by now.

Carlo Gebler, whose version of *The Dance of Death* opens at the Tricycle Theatre next week, knows this perfectly well – when talk turns to the sheer volume of “Hibernicised” classics he mutters “Disgusting, isn’t it?” and he seems to mean it. Although, he says he admires Frank McGuinness’s version of *Three Sisters*, for example, he is as unimpressed by Irishness as only an Irishman can be, blaming the glut of Irish plays and adaptations we have seen in recent years on “the English lashing themselves for the

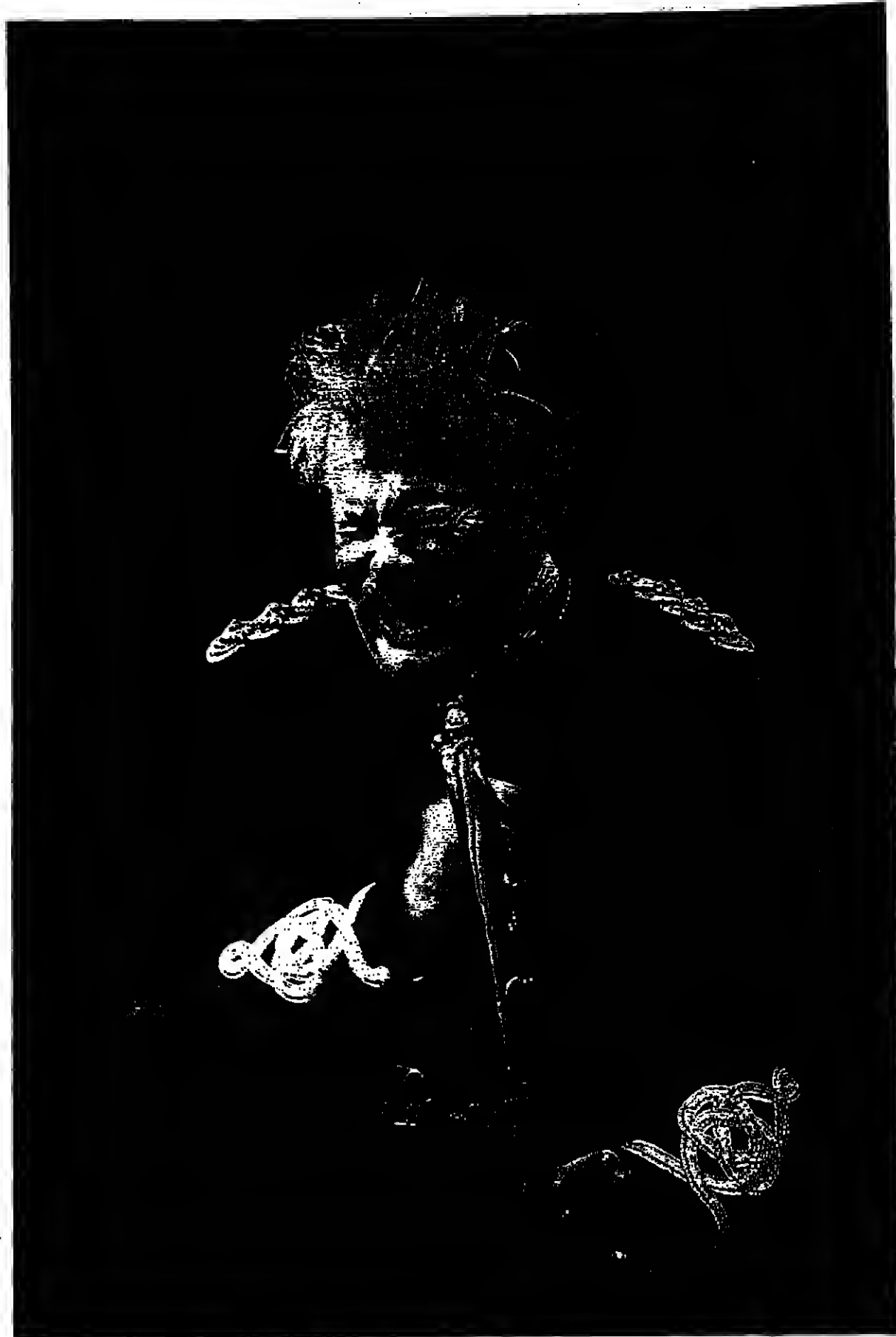
action on a garrison island off the Swedish coast. Gebler places it in a Martello tower, one of many built around the Irish coast in expectation of Napoleonic invasion; and there is an extravagance in the vicious, often hilariously black rhetoric that Strindberg’s central characters, a superannuated captain and his wife, hurl at each other which suits Irish idioms better than it might suit a more restrained English version.

Gebler’s version seems like a close reading of Strindberg, until you compare it with a more literal translation. His working practice was to read a couple of pages of the play in every translation he could get, then write down from memory what he thought happened. When he had been through the entire play like this, he compared his version with the Swedish original and found it was 4,000 to 5,000 words longer. So, he set about slashing every one of his sentences to the length of Strindberg’s original ones, chucking out fidelity and occasionally comprehensibility in favour of pace.

On the page, the result works fine, at least in Part 1 (*The Dance of Death* is two plays, both of which are to be performed at the Tricycle – take a cushion). But you know what they say, “*Traduttore, traditore*”: to translate is to betray. The problem facing the adaptor who takes a classic to Ireland is not simply what he loses, but what he might gain.

In the case of *The Dance of Death*, Gebler gains a whole new subtext about sectarian and national conflict. The Captain and his wife, Edgar and Alice, here become a mixed marriage – he is an impoverished Protestant, she is from a rather grander Catholic family; his quarrel with her cousin (Kurt in the original, here renamed Conor) takes on explicitly religious overtones. Gebler takes this theme even further by setting Part 1 in the summer of 1913, so that Part 2, which takes up the story two-and-a-half years later, coincides with the Easter Rising of 1916. Givens the play’s deeply personal nature – Strindberg based it, rather too obviously for comfort, on his sister and her husband – this political dimension may offend Strindberg purists. They may also be worried about the way Gebler plays up aspects of the story – notably a sub-plot about some shares.

Gebler himself has no doubt that he is serving the play: “I wanted to make the intrinsic qualities even stronger – I wanted to make it seem more what it was than it was at the moment, if that makes sense.” In his view, making the marriage a mixed



High dudgeon: Michael Cochrane plays Gebler's Protestant Captain in *'The Dance of Death'* at the Tricycle

The problem facing the adaptor who takes a classic to Ireland is not simply what he loses, but what he might gain

empire: “Now we’re taking our punishment and we’ll do Chekhov in Mayo, we’ll show that we’re really sorry and we’ll have all this Irish stuff all over our theatre.”

But when Nicholas Kent, the Tricycle’s artistic director and director of this production, asked Gebler to consider shifting *The Dance of Death*, he didn’t hesitate. For one thing, he is, he says, a great lover of Strindberg, having been attracted as a teenager to the sheer raging insanity of his autobiographical *Inferno* – a record of alchemical experiments and a kind of mystical paranoia written during the 1890s, just a few years before *The Dance of Death*. On top of that, Ireland is the only place he knows – setting the play there immediately gave him a “voice”, a vernacular he could work in. But finally, Gebler simply felt intuitively that the play would be at home in an Irish setting.

Certainly, some aspects translate very naturally: where Strindberg placed the

one and making Kurt/Conor, a character Strindberg apparently identified with, a Catholic accentuates Strindberg’s sense of being an outsider. Adding the Easter Rising emphasises the theme of betrayal which runs through the two plays – as in his novel *The Cure*, Gebler is intrigued by the point of view of the Irish-born servants of English rule: in this case, the attitude towards the Rising of the soldier whose comrades are dying like flies in Flanders.

As for the plot elements he plays up, he says this is done to make sense of a play which at times strays very far away from being sensible. He attributes the incoherencies to the way Strindberg wrote the play: after finishing Part 1, he sent it to his German trans-

lator and friend, Emil Schering, who wrote back that no theatre would ever put it on because, in Gebler’s phrase: “They would be sitting their wrists in the intermission.” (Coincidentally, this is the phrase Nicholas Kent used when rejecting a previous play of Gebler’s – he clearly inherits his sunny temperament from his mother, novelist Edna O’Brien, who has never been famous for her optimistic world-view.) He then wrote the marginally more cheerful Part 2 without re-reading what he had already done, adding some discrepancies (such as the Captain’s sudden apparent affluence) which Gebler felt needed sorting out.

Has taking Strindberg to Ireland been worth the trip? Audiences can decide next

Tuesday: Gebler himself has no doubt that his changes help to keep the action moving smoothly. Strindberg himself would have approved: “The thing to remember about Strindberg,” according to Gebler, “is that, although an outcast, he was very, very practical. His idea, and I share his sentiments, is: they’re going to come in, they’re going to pay money, they’re going to sit for a couple of hours, they could be doing something much, much better – give them a damn good time.”

The Dance of Death, Parts 1 and 2, opens on Tuesday 31 March at the Tricycle Theatre, London, NW6 (0171 328 1000). Carlo Gebler’s novel ‘How to Murder a Man’ is published next week by Little, Brown.

Long time waiting for a dry debate

Prowse fails to live up to over-excited expectations of European drama, says Sue Wilson

In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields/The Dying Gaul/The Millionaire, Citizens Theatre, Glasgow

WITH PATRICE Chereau’s 1995 production of Bernard-Marie Koltes’s *Dans La Solitude des Champs de Coton* still vivid in theatre-going memory as one of the Edinburgh Festival’s all-time highlights, expectations of Philip Prowse’s new English-language production – given the Citz’s long and honourable track-record of staging European drama – were running high.

That anticipation (for those few who were party to the facts prior to finding the apologies slip in their programmes on opening night) was decidedly muddled, however, by the discovery that Prowse and company were working from the wrong script, namely a translation unauthorised by Koltes’s estate, rather than the official version by Jeffrey Wainwright, who – then in blissful ignorance of the substitution – wrote about the play in *The Independent* a couple of weeks ago.

Several days’ increasingly frantic negotiations between the theatre and Koltes’s agent and executors, including talk of an injunction to prevent the play opening, resulted in the aforementioned apology to all concerned (though not in explanation of exactly how such a fundamental error occurred), with the show – “a production based on work done by the company on a translation by Christopher Rathbone” – duly going on. Perhaps the best outcome to be looked for in such circumstances would be a triumph for Prowse’s version, but unfortunately it proved to be about as much of a damp squib as Koltes’s extraordinary verbal architecture allows.

The sheer, fiendishly loaded glory of Koltes’s language, in this emblematically metaphysical tale of Dealer and Client meeting in some twilight urban ne’er-world, of itself supplies superabundant mental fodder to sustain the piece’s hour-long duration, with its intricate, adamant, scalpel-sharp probes of the symbiosis between desire, need, power, fear, gratification and morality. However, Prowse’s direction – deliberately, one presumes – brings almost nothing extra to the text, apart from a stylish upside-down design, with both Andrew Joseph’s and Robert David MacDonald’s performances characterised by a near-total dearth of expressive inflection reducing the tone of the drama to little more than dry intellectual debate, the pair’s frequent fluffs and stumbles over lines punctuating the necessary tension still further.

Thankfully, things improved considerably over the next two nights, in the latest instalment of a season that certainly highlights the consistently ambitious sweep of the Citz’s work. Contemporary American drama was next up, with the world premiere of Craig Lucas’s latest play looking to build on the reputation established by previous works such as *Prelude to a Kiss* and *Longtime Companion*.

The Mamet-tinged story of a young screenwriter, Robert (Stephen Scott), seeking to commemorate his recently dead lover by making the (eponymous) movie they worked on together, it touches deftly on a whole cluster of contemporary preoccupations: Cyber-communication, psychotherapy, AIDS, the existence of angels, Buddhist philosophy and the legacy of the Holocaust all surface against the duplicitous machinations of the film industry, embodied by the Mephistophelian figure of Jeffrey (Henry Ian Cusick), the film’s chillingly amoral producer. While a number of alarmingly creaky plot-hinges are required to encompass this little lot, a compellingly realised trio of central performances – including Lorna McDovitt as Jeffrey’s shrewd but emotionally adrift wife Elaine – provide a vibrant human core to the action, enabling most of its densely compacted themes to breathe with a grossing, even gripping resonance.

And finally, in the main house, a re-revival of Shaw’s late comedy of money and (ill) manners, staged with wonderful grit and panache by director Giles Hargal, and Kenny Miller’s airy elegant sign. Anne Myatt stars as Epifania, the obstreperous middle-aged heiress of title, simultaneously waging war on her estranged playboy-sportsman husband while trying – if only half-consciously – to find an outlet for her formidable passions and energies in a society still decidedly uncomfortable with women of independent minds and means.

While the gradual shift from Cowdrey’s barbed badinage towards weightier ideological concerns, dissecting the relations between class, capital, power and labour, does grind its gears at times, the dialogue’s reliable pithiness and expertly maintained pitch, between character-realism and camp, cutting satire, keeps things flowing at a cracking, crackling pace, boosted by performances all round of equal poise, vigour and flourish.

Paul Taylor

All running until 4 April. Bookings on 011 429 0022.

THE INDEPENDENT WIN A FAIRYTALE BREAK AT DALHOUSIE CASTLE



Take part in our unique competition and you could be enjoying an unforgettable romantic weekend at the 13th century Dalhousie Castle hotel. Situated in countryside just 20 minutes from the heart of Edinburgh, the castle has played host to many famous historical figures from Oliver Cromwell to Queen Victoria.

leave your name and full address.

Q: When is Burns night celebrated?

Call 0930 514 881

If you're not lucky enough to win, why not take advantage of an exclusive offer for independent readers anyway? For the special rate of just £115 per person treat yourself and your partner to a two night stay with luxury accommodation, full Scottish breakfasts and dinner in the Dunrobin restaurant on one night. Offer valid until 31st May 1998, excluding Easter and subject to availability. Offer based on two sharing a room for a minimum two night stay.

To book call Dalhousie Castle on 01875 820153 or e-mail info@dalhousiecastle.co.uk quoting The Independent offer

To enter this competition dial the number below, answer the following question on line and

Educated Rita's older sister learns to speak for herself

THE BIGGEST no-show in drama is, of course, Beckett's Godot. A character who runs Godot a close second is Ronnie, the character whose failure to arrive turns out to be a god-send in disguise for the young heroine of *Roots*, Arnold Wesker's landmark 1959 play beautifully revived by John Retallack in a touring co-production between Oxford Stage Company and the Palace Theatre, Watford.

The unseen Ronnie has been living in London for three years with Beatie Bryant, whom he has taught to read the *Guardian* and pumped full of progress ideas she has not truly assimilated. Samantha Spiro splendidly projects the naïve missionary ardour with which Beatie returns for a visit to her rural, working-class, family home in Norfolk. Tending to stand on chairs when she does so, she spouts Ronnie's thoughts at her relations, and it is possible that there is two knowingly subversive a note in Ms Spiro's gesticulating delivery of these pronouncements. The audience should begin to deduce that Ronnie is a bit of a pain (though not for the same reasons that Beatie's folks do): Beatie herself should be the largely unconscious agent of this.

Bovine, submissive, rejecting all attempts at high culture as “squit”, the family are spectacularly in fertile ground for Ronnie's proxy seeds of wisdom. But Retallack, who is a master at coaxing superb ensemble playing from a company, does not fall into the trap of presenting them from Beatie's point of view or from imagining that that point of view is inflexible. The actors here are excellent: You



Retallack re-tells Wesker's story of the awakening of an independent female spirit

really feel that these people have a lifetime of shared memories, subterranean veins of humour and affection running through the block of their stupidity. Their existence may be mind-numbing, incurious and repetitive but we see that there are saving graces.

Sally Mates is superb as the mother: the sad, doomed attempts to establish some intimacy with her runaway daughter and then the ugly triumphalism – the product of years of being cooped up and condescending to – when Ronnie writes to break

off with Beatie. Ms Mates induces audience empathy with this woman, even as you deplore her tactics.

A play about the awakening of an independent female spirit, *Roots* has echoes of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the defiant solo dance at the end of Act One, and pre-echoes of *Educating Rita*, in the resilient humour and inquisitiveness of its heroine.

Retallack stages the moment at the end when the beleaguered Beatie suddenly stops parroting Ronnie and finds her own voice (“I’m be-

ginning... I’m beginning!”) in a manner that is wonderfully true to its mix of realism and romanticism. A screen drops between Beatie and her family at the aborted tea party, leaving her alone in a vast black and white projection of lonely Norfolk landscape, stretches flat and bare under a lowering sky. A new, difficult start and an image that is rightly both embarrassing and uplifting, gauche and glorious.

Long time waiting for a dry debate

Sue Wilson

In the theatre of the Canine, Tony Blair's Millionaire Theatre, Glasgow...

The vegetables in your Sunday lunch should worry you as much as the beef, says Rose Prince



Demand for out-of-season vegetables is making farmers use more chemicals on land to promote growth. Ian Nelson (below) believes organic methods are better for customers and for business Photograph below: Mike Walker

WE WORRY about meat. We think about how much we eat and whether it affects our health, where it comes from and how it was grown; we despair of the industry that supplies it and some of us worry that we ourselves demanded too much of that industry, forcing it into unorthodox production methods in order to supply the demands of millions for a beef burger a day. And all the time we worry and fret about evidence being given to the current BSE public inquiry, directives are given by the medical profession, the Department of Health and the vegetarian lobby to eat plenty of vegetables.

Those of us concerned about our health are eating our greens. Lots of them. We are quite hooked on them now – and anyone who picks up a modern cookbook or eats out regularly is discovering that there are hundreds of varieties out there. Retailers are bending over backwards to supply them – all year round and cheaply of course, because we hate paying for vegetables and feel affronted if our produce bill comes near that for meat or fish.

But look closer at the industry that is making sure that we feel good about ourselves and the way we are treating our bodies and there is an uncomfortable feeling that our good intentions are harmful – to our health, our land and the industry itself. Visit any supermarket and you will find a huge and eclectic range of produce. One Waitrose store boasted 17 species of potato, ten of mushrooms and every conceivable type of edible root, squashes and onions, mange tout and courgettes, dozens of lettuces – or salad leaves as they are now known – and the exotic pak choi, seaweed and water chestnuts. In total 125 varieties, very few of them in season and most are imports.

Alan Wilson, Waitrose's agronomist

Time to go back to our roots

says: "Now the consumer is more city based they have come to expect things like asparagus to be available all year round." While he feels Waitrose are obliged to offer choice to the better-travelled customer, he admits that doing so increased the store's profitability.

The trouble is that if the consumer chooses to eat certain vegetables out of season, the produce must be chemically altered in some way to encourage growth outside that season. If it cannot be done, those vegetables have to be imported. Many of the pesticides and fertilisers used on crops are not safe if the clearance period, (that is the time between spraying and being put on a shop shelf) is not long enough. There is no enforced regulation in the business to ensure that this is not the case.

Intensive farming and its use of chemicals has long been suspected as being at the heart of many allergy-related and some neurological diseases. Heavy use of chemicals in agriculture has led to soil becoming merely a holding material for seedlings and whatever growth-enhancers the farmer uses. Intensive farming also has a weak reputation in business ethics. Use of



gang work forces is not unusual in Kent and East Anglia. Teams of workers – many of them immigrants – working for below the minimum wage set by the Agriculture Wages Board are brought in for harvesting.

Alan Wilson does not believe the practice is widespread. All of Waitrose's farm workers are full-time and they have a history of clean employee-employer practice. He says that British vegetable

farming "is a little too intensive", and, recognising the public's loss of confidence, the supermarket has added organic vegetables to their shelves. Not many – out of the 125 vegetables previously mentioned, only 16 were organically grown.

Before all the blame is laid at the feet of the growers, note that it is the supermarkets who are the main, sometimes sole, client of the big firms. One farmer, who did not want to be named, said: "If the

client want their spring greens a week early, the grower is unlikely to mention that they were only sprayed with a pesticide last week and that there ought to be a long abatement period before cutting. He cuts and sells rather than losing business."

Many consumers, particularly those who are town and city-based, are ignorant of growing seasons and never stop to wonder where their beloved tough little french beans are growing in the winter.

So it is as well-meaning veg lovers who are putting the whole industry under intense pressure to satisfy, at all costs, our desire to cook and eat whatever and as much as we desire. It is quite common in restaurants as well as in British home cooking to find half a dozen different vegetables accompanying the roast meat, regardless of whether they are a happy composition for that dish. Restaurants often serve them in a separate little dish as if to say "look – we tried hard with the vegetables," confusing the diner who wonders if they should transfer the lukewarm mange tout, broccoli and two types of potato to their plate or eat them straight off the serving dish. "Meat and two veg" is a thing of the past, now we have

"meat with six out-of-season imports." One man with a different approach to growing and eating his greens is the organic farmer Ian Nelson. Sunnyfield's, his farm on the south coast near Southampton, has had Soil Association approval for 11 years. Eight years ago Nelson took it over. He was initially trained in agriculture and horticulture. He took his knowledge to Malawi in Africa on a Voluntary Services Overseas project, showing the farmers there how to increase yields and lessen the probability of losing crops through pest invasion. The VSO project was successful, but returning home was Nelson's "road to Damascus"; he was appalled that here similar methods of growing should be employed when the British people were in no way hungry.

He is anxious to get across that he is "not a hippy". He says: "If you try to dominate nature rather than stay within its confines it will have fatal consequences." Over the year 150 varieties of produce are grown at Sunnyfield's – everything from roots and onions to the more exotic red chard.

He believes that where possible we should seek out superior tasting naturally grown vegetables, eat them discriminately and pay more. Nelson's customers are happy to shell out for organic, believing a superior product can stand alone as a dish. "We put the finest oil in our cars, why not a similar grade fuel for our bodies?" he asks.

"We have to learn from the disaster in beef farming. Mass-production successes and strains an industry often with catastrophic consequences realised too late. A tempered, less ardent course in buying and eating our food could be preventative without a change of quality in our lives."

There's a difference between meddling and muddling

THERE are some allegations about politicians to which the only reaction can be: is he really that stupid?

Into this category falls the claim that Tony Blair last week lobbied his Italian counterpart on behalf of Rupert Murdoch's £4bn attempt to buy the Berlusconi television empire.

Mr Blair's desire to keep on the right side of the owner of the *Sun* is well known. But to intervene so soon after Mr Murdoch's recent gracing of the front pages at the BBC offering Messrs Hall and Shepherd a consultancy on *Match Of The Day* after the Newcastle fiasco.

"It was Prodi who called Blair," a Downing Street spokesman is said to have snarled, "the case falls at the first hurdle." And maybe it does. But about Tony Blair's bankings to meddle in industry, the case is rather stronger.

From the moment he became Labour leader four years ago, he has courted businessmen, and understandably so. Nothing would help exercise memories of bad Old Labour, and its kneejerk hostility to enterprise, than their support.

Successful industrialists also were by definition dynamic, and, increasingly, classless – the very image of Blair's New Britain. And it is an affair not just of the head, but of the heart, born perhaps of naïveté, perhaps of the instinctive affinity of members of the high achievers club, perhaps even of the romantic notion that in mutual admiration's golden glow, all Britain's ills would vanish.

And feelings were reciprocated. New Labour's courtship of the City of London dispelled ancient fears. Business liked Mr Blair's pleasant certainty of tone, his conciliatory language on Europe. They liked him for his knack of combining the lucrative and the visionary, as in the pre-election promise of BT linking every classroom to the global information highway (in return for a relaxation of the current ban on BT's moving into conventional, entertainment television). Above all, it liked him because he looked a winner. But since May, Mr Blair's interest in industry has only grown. Indeed, he shows signs of wanting not just to encourage it, but to shape it.

At one level, the reasoning is impeccable. You may quarrel with his thesis that in the post-Cold War world, where the market is king, the most powerful men on the planet are not heads of governments, but the chairmen of multi-national corporations, able to move their money and operations to where labour is cheapest and government most welcoming. But if that is the case, then a politician has little choice but to seek to win over these new emperors, and make sure that as many of them as possible owe their ultimate allegiance to Britain.

That philosophy was most visible in the recent SmithKline-Beecham/Glaxo affair.

There is little doubt that Downing Street encouraged the proposed merger, in the belief that if SIB carried out an earlier plan to link with a US competitor, it would be lost to America. Far better to endow



Just how good is Tony Blair at wooing industry? Photograph: Brian Harris

Britain with a mighty drugs company that would dwarf its international competitors, Sir Richard Sykes of Glaxo contended. And not surprisingly, Mr Blair agreed. Good for Labour, he must have thought, and good for the country.

Of course, none of this is exactly new. Thirty years ago, another

Arnold Weinstock's efforts to fuse English Electric, AEL, and General Electric into a single company that would give Britain a seat at the top table of the world's electrical industry.

A press baron was around too: Cecil King, who as proprietor of the most important British tabloid of the day had

Tony Blair's interest in industry has grown since May, indeed, he shows signs of wanting not just to encourage it, but to shape it

Labour Prime Minister was vowing to modernise Britain. Back in those days the catchphrase wasn't "globalisation" but "the white heat of the technological revolution." Its author, Harold Wilson, was no less smitten with businessmen than Tony Blair; he backed to the hilt

to be kept on board (though in the end he jumped ship spectacularly). Thanks to globalisation, King's counterpart today comes from Australia, and carries a US passport (and may one day jump ship too).

But is it necessarily good for Labour, let alone Britain? The

spectacle of politicians cosying up to businessmen raises three separate problems.

The first is that malign interest of fundraising and influence-buying. Bernice Ecclestone's £1m donation to the Labour party "co-incided," as they say, with a notable change of Labour policy on tobacco advertising in Formula One. Then there is the age-old pitfall of cronyism.

Governments are not elected to favour one company among many, nor to give a particular entrepreneur the inside track over his rivals. Their job is to create a benign and equal environment for all.

Let the public sector use the skills and experience of businessmen by all means, and this Government has done so more than most, but not if, for argument's sake, the presence of Martin Taylor of Barclays at the head of the tax-and-benefits task force were to see any future merger of Barclays and NatWest judged not on its merits, but on the man.

And finally, even in this era of globalisation and the single currency, size may not be everything. Mr Blair may think so. But perhaps not his Chancellor, and certainly not Mrs Margaret Beckett, the President of the Board of Trade, known in the City as "Mrs Block-It" for her habit of referring every deal in sight to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

She believes that competition, at least as much as the huge economies of scale generated by oligopolistic mega-corporations, produces the best deal for consumers.

The argument is open. It

could yet contain the seeds of ruinous internal strife for Labour if its industrial policy goes wrong.

But there is one consolation. Tony Blair the deal maker is not so hot. Indeed, if he'd been head of the mergers and acquisitions department of a

bank, rather than a Government, he would have been out on his neck by now.

Labour had to give back Bernice Ecclestone his £1m. BT's promise of the Internet in every classroom has not come to pass.

The merger of SmithKline

and Glaxo fell through, and Rupert Murdoch isn't going to buy an Italian TV network.

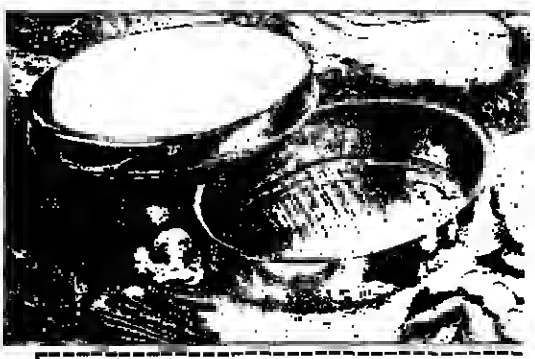
If this really was the Bank of Great Britain PLC, and Tony Blair its Chief Executive, it would long since have picked up his golden severance cheque.

— Rupert Cornwell

THE INDEPENDENT Stainless Steel Roasters

- from £27.95 inc. p&p

Whether you want to cook a tasty casserole or a Sunday roast, one of these stainless steel roasters will be perfect for the job. There are two popular designs to choose from: an oval roaster (pictured) measuring 36cm x 23cm (14 1/4 x 9") at £27.95 and a round roaster 30cm in diameter (11 1/2") at £29.95. Both prices include postage and packing. The roasters can be used on the hob or in the oven. They also have a wire rack so that, for a healthier, lower-fat cooking method, you can place your chosen meat on top of the rack and any excess fat will drain off during cooking. The oval roaster also has a dual purpose lid which can be used as an attractive serving dish. These traditional roasters will look stylish in any kitchen and are dishwasher safe and easy to clean.



Please send me _____ Oval Roaster(s) to £27.95 each
Please send me _____ Round Roaster(s) to £29.95 each

I enclose a crossed cheque for £ _____ (address on back) made payable to: NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING LTD or debit my Access/Visa account by this amount. My card number is _____

Expiry Date _____ Signature _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

Post Code _____ Send to: THE INDEPENDENT ROASTER OFFER, PO Box 9477, London E5 1SH

Please tick this box if you do not wish to receive future offers from New Newspaper Publishing Ltd or companies approved by Newspaper Publishing Ltd ☐ (NPS)

Buy in England 0900 444 444 New Newspaper Publishing Ltd. Buy Office: 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 4GL

And the best-dressed actress award goes to...

The Oscars ceremony has become one of the biggest nights out, not for the stars and the silver screen but for the fashion industry.

Getting your dress on the backs of those stars is one of the greatest publicity stunts possible. Money cannot buy the sort of personal endorsement a star like Kate Winslet or Madonna gives when they are snapped by the world's cameras. And on Monday night the four British actresses nominated might not have won anything, but some of our fashion stars came out with flying colours. Alexander McQueen for one. His was the coup of the night: a dragonfly embroidered gown by the designer for Givenchy. And Nicole Farhi scored her first ever Oscar coup and should sign Judi Dench up for the next advertising campaign immediately. John Galliano dressed Cameron Diaz under his Dior label.

So forget acting ability. All we were really interested in was the frocks, in the greatest catwalk show of all.

Tamsin Blanchard and Melanie Rickey nominate the most glamorous night's winners and the losers



Kate Winslet in Alexander McQueen for Givenchy. Full marks for supporting a British fashion export and putting her faith in a young designer. Kate went for a fitting for her deep sea-green gown with matching bolero with dragonflies and weeping willow branches, hand-embroidered in silk thread and crystals on the morning of McQueen's show for Givenchy two weeks ago. The final fittings were when the dress, the actress and the seamstresses came to McQueen's east London studio. Ms Winslet, who wore Vivienne Westwood to last year's Academy Awards, agreed to wear Givenchy on the understanding that the house did not make a dress for any other Oscar nominee. It fitted her immaculately. The glass-beaded bag by Antonio Miranda and shoes in embroidered silk matched.



Judi Dench had been for fittings with John Galliano but opted at the last minute for this silver spider-web crystal beaded lace dress by New York duo Badgley Mischka. The skirt has a hand-painted hem and is an adaptation of a dress from the pair's autumn/winter '98 collection. If Oscar night was a competition of style, Dench, 58, won hands down.



Judi Dench wore a silver grey organza slip and organza coat by Nicole Farhi. The Dame met the designer through Ms Farhi's husband, the playwright David Hare. Dench is currently starring in his play, 'Amy's View'. The 63-year-old star looked fabulously understated and elegant and avoided the mutton-dressed-as-lamb syndrome successfully. She also avoided the 'everything-but-the-kitchen-sink' school of Oscar dressing. Full marks all round; every inch the star.



Helen Hunt wore an ice blue bustier dress by Gucci. The colour was fresh and cool, though it crinkled a lot. Previously, Hunt has been a fan of Isaac Mizrahi but the American designer's office denied the dress was his. "It would have fitted a lot better if it had been by Mizrahi," she spat.



Kim Basinger wore a pistachio sash gown by Brian Rennie of German label Escada Couture, and ended up looking like a female version of the Oscar statuette. All the illusions of her femme fatale image in 'LA Confidential' were shattered in one lumpy, ill-fitting frump frock.



Sharon Stone attended the ceremony wearing every Hollywood movie star's favourite, Vera Wang. Her casual elegance shone out - how clever to wear a crisp white shirt wrapped innocently into a duchess satin evening skirt. Daring too, to reveal all that cleavage.



Minnie Driver. The dress was fine. But why oh why, on a warm Hollywood night, does anyone need to wrap a fox fur round her shoulders? Versace must accept responsibility.



Helena Bonham Carter typically wore a dress without a designer label. It was a one-off from a costume-maker. She always looks painfully thin and this dress was hanging off her. But it had a certain fragile Audrey Hepburn-style charm and she looked comfortable too.



Cher. The singer/actress has already gone down in the annals of Oscar-night mistakes but this one was a real corker. Imagine. You spend all that money on cosmetic surgery and hairpieces and you plunk a pirate's hat on top of it all!

Night when Titanic, not Britannia, ruled the waves

TERSELY worded diplomatic note to the Academy may in order after this year's Oscars - perhaps delivered from the minister Chris Smith, via promised new British film of in Los Angeles. The collection handed to Britain's actresses was surely a display of the cheapest American optimism. And *The Full Monty* - crowning by *Titanic*, with an Oscar for best score, was only less than satisfactory. A major crisis was only narrowly averted by Helen Hunt, American who took the best actress Oscar from under the nose of the four British nominees. The first time she saw *Her* *Mrs Brown*, she insisted she was convinced Dame Dench would get the Academy Award. "And in my mind she has," she said. "And as Julie Christie, and so has Anna Bonham Carter, and so Kate Winslet."

The full strangeness of the night was on display on Monday night, when stretch limos, their televisions aglow but occupants otherwise invisible, crowded the streets of South Central around the Shrine Auditorium. It is the night, after all, when people who dress up and pretend for a living do their best to persuade a world audience that they are, by turns, tearful, ecstatic and lost for words.

In the end, *Titanic's* night of triumph fell strangely flat, though the film dominated the evening from the moment presenter Billy Crystal sank to the stage on a giant glow. "What a shock," said Madonna, drily summing up the mood as she announced that "My Heart Will Go On", the theme tune sung by Celine Dion which has been virtually inseparable in America this spring, had won best original song.

Titanic scooped 11 of 17 possible Oscars, tying *Ben Hur's* record, and including one for Briton Peter Lamont, for art direction. As predicted, it cleaned up the production and technical awards and delivered two statuettes to director James Cameron, for best director and best editing and one for producer Jon Landau for best film, while its acting and writing were ignored. Notable by its absence was the male lead Leonardo DiCaprio, who is rapidly emerging as Hollywood's biggest heartthrob but failed to be even nominated for best actor.

Cameron, initially ridiculed for running the film hugely over-budget, now celebrated as one of the great Hollywood directors, asked for a moment's silence for a film based "on a real event where real people died". Then he borrowed a line from his own script, crowing: "I am the king of the world! This is a night to remember. Let's party till dawn." If it was any consolation to the British crowd, the ceremony seemed one of the dullest of recent years, devoid of much real excitement or drama. For an event that celebrates the young and the beautiful, it was curiously heavy with faces of the past, including a line-up of ancient Oscar winners that included Luise Rainer, 88, who won in 1936 for *The Great Ziegfeld*.

Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, two rising young actors who won for jointly writing the screenplay for *Good Will Hunting*, attended with their mothers. The best impromptu performance of the night came from Mike Van Diem, whose film *Character* won the Oscar for best foreign film, four days before it opens in the US. Drunk with delight, he introduced himself to Sharon Stone as "just another crazy Dutch director". "This ought to tell you that it probably has, you know, like damn stunning subtitles," he said from the stage.

Helen Hunt, celebrated US TV comedienne, took her first major film role starring opposite Tom Hanks in *Twister*. She had emerged late in the game as the favourite for the comedy *As Good as It Gets* opposite Jack Nicholson, who took the Best Actor award.

British losers were gracious in defeat. Kate Winslet declared she was "not in the slightest" disappointed, though it is the second time - after her nomination for *Sense and Sensibility* - that Oscar has escaped her. "I'm just thrilled to be here," said Dame Judi, who had won the Golden Globe that often signals Oscar success. "I have seen people I have only ever seen on the screen."

The Full Monty, with four nominations, was never favourite for best picture or best director, while a plagiarism suit, whatever its merits, may have hurt the chances of Simon Beaufoy for winning best screenplay. Only Anne Dudley, the composer, won an Oscar. "I think Hollywood really liked this movie, but they couldn't bring themselves to give it best picture with *Titanic* in the ring," she said. "I think they wanted to give it something and I was there."

Winners of the 70th Academy Awards

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Best picture:
"Titanic" (20th Century Fox/Paramount)</p> <p>Best performance by an actor in a leading role:
Jack Nicholson in "As Good as It Gets" (TriStar)</p> <p>Best performance by an actress in a leading role:
Helen Hunt in "As Good as It Gets" (TriStar)</p> <p>Best director:
James Cameron, "Titanic" (20th Century Fox/Paramount)</p> <p>Best performance by an actor in a supporting role:
Robin Williams in "Good Will Hunting" (Miramax)</p> <p>Best performance by an actress in a supporting role:
Kim Basinger in "LA Confidential" (Warner Bros)</p> <p>Best achievement in art direction:
"Titanic" Art direction Peter Lamont, Set direction Michael Ford</p> <p>Best achievement in costume design:
"Titanic" Deborah L. Scott</p> <p>Best make-up:
"Men In Black" Rick Baker and David LeMay</p> <p>Best achievement in sound editing:
"Titanic" Conrad Buff, James Cameron and Richard A. Harris</p> <p>Best original dramatic score:
"Titanic" James Horner</p> <p>Best original musical or comedy score:
"The Full Monty" Annie Dudley</p> <p>Best original song:
"My Heart Will Go On" from "Titanic" James Horner and Will Jennings</p> <p>Best foreign language film:
"Character" the Netherlands (A First Floor Features production)</p> <p>Best adapted screenplay:
"LA Confidential" Brian Koppelman and Curtis Hanson</p> <p>Best screenplay:
"Good Will Hunting" Ben Affleck and Matt Damon</p> <p>Best achievement in cinematography:
"Titanic" Russell Carpenter</p> | <p>Best documentary feature:
"The Long Way Home" Rabbi Marvin Hier and Richard Trank</p> <p>Best achievement in visual effects:
"Titanic" Robert Legato, Mark Lasoff, Thomas L. Fisher and Michael Kanfer</p> <p>Best achievement in sound:
"Titanic" Gary Rydstrom, Tom Johnson, Gary Summers and Mark Ulan</p> <p>Best achievement in sound effects editing:
"Titanic" Tom Bellfort and Christopher Boyes</p> <p>Best film editing:
"Titanic" Conrad Buff, James Cameron and Richard A. Harris</p> <p>Best original dramatic score:
"Titanic" James Horner</p> <p>Best original musical or comedy score:
"The Full Monty" Annie Dudley</p> <p>Best original song:
"My Heart Will Go On" from "Titanic" James Horner and Will Jennings</p> <p>Best foreign language film:
"Character" the Netherlands (A First Floor Features production)</p> <p>Best adapted screenplay:
"LA Confidential" Brian Koppelman and Curtis Hanson</p> <p>Best screenplay:
"Good Will Hunting" Ben Affleck and Matt Damon</p> <p>Best achievement in cinematography:
"Titanic" Russell Carpenter</p> |
|---|--|

THE INDEPENDENT

EDITOR: ROSIE BOYCOTT; EDITOR IN CHIEF: ANDREW MARR
DEPUTY EDITOR: CHRIS BLACKHURST
ADDRESS: 1 CANADA SQUARE, CANARY WHARF, LONDON E14 5DL
TELEPHONE: 0171 293 2000 OR 0171 345 2000
FAX: 0171 293 2435 OR 0171 345 2435
THE INDEPENDENT ON THE INTERNET: WWW.INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Clinton's vision of a new Africa

WHEN Bill Clinton flies into Cape Town tomorrow to meet Nelson Mandela, two of the world's more charismatic statesmen will have the opportunity to examine one of the world's more intractable problems. How can we lift Africa from the bottom of the economic heap and liberate it from the violence, despotism and famine that have haunted it for too long? Both men share a vision of a new Africa. As President Clinton put it to his audience in Ghana: "One hundred years from now your grandchildren and mine will look back and say this was the beginning of an African Renaissance" - a resonant phrase borrowed from the ANC itself.

It may well take a century to see democratic lion-economies roaring out of Africa. Even so, for a continent that has long been written off as an economic and political basket-case it was a bold statement. What now must Clinton and the West - and Africans themselves - do to stimulate the re-birth of the continent?

The first thing is to recognise that Africa is not a homogenous mass. True there are still states where the familiar post-independence mix of one-partyism, endemic corruption and brutality retains its grip. But parts of Africa are emerging from this model as surely, painfully and slowly they escaped from colonialism. Cruel and capricious "presidents for life" like Amin of Uganda, Banda of Malawi and Mobutu of Zaire have gone. They were propped up by the West in the Cold War era when America's allies were chosen by their hostility to the Soviet Union and their willingness to do what the CIA wanted.

Africa is no longer used as a proxy battlefield by the old superpowers. Apartheid is over. The peoples of half of sub-Saharan Africa's 48 nations now choose their own governments. Old-style leaders like former President Nyerere of Tanzania and President Moi of Kenya want to resist what they call "Coca-Cola style democracy" being imposed on Africa. Quite right. When the British left behind Westminster-style parliaments complete with maces, speakers and wigs they did not long survive as more than dignified curiosities. There can be no question of imposing constitutions. Equally there can be no hiding behind one-partyism as the only way to manage ethnic conflict.

There are new and hopeful exemplars in Africa. It was no accident that Clinton chose to go to a country like Uganda. President Museveni does not run a Scandinavian-style perfect democratic regime. What he has worked for is to give his long-suffering people a degree of stability without resorting to the worst despotism of his predecessors. In Uganda one sees the beginnings of the freedoms that ensure stability and a political system that accommodates ethnicity and does not exploit it - the rule of law, protection of minorities, freedom of the press and so on. Despite its move to multi-party democracy the intimidation witnessed in the recent elections shows that Kenya still falls far short of the progress of its smaller neighbour.

The Kenyan High Commissioner in London said on television that he didn't care that Clinton hadn't chosen to drop in on Nairobi. Don't you believe it. It hurts. What also hurts is the embargo on aid to Kenya. That is why it stands and should continue. It is also a reason why the West needs to turn its attention to the logical corollary of this approach and look at large scale debt cancellation for countries where the beginnings of good governance are providing the underpinnings for economic growth.

Far away from Gaborone, Cape Town and Kampala the West will soon have an opportunity to extend its initiative beyond pure diplomacy. Next month our own Gordon Brown will tell the World Bank/IMF summit in Washington, and the G7 meeting that follows it in Birmingham in May, about his proposal to relieve debt and poverty in Africa. It will involve transferring some of the burden of debt from those nations least able to bear it to the bigger developing economies. The West has demonstrated what can be done with political will when it came to assisting the economies of the former Soviet Union and, most recently, the far east. As of this week the serious debate on what can be done to help Africa has really begun. President Clinton must now match the excellent pace he has set in the diplomatic field and lead the West in lending urgency to rescuing a too-long neglected and misunderstood continent.

Blair the lobbyist?

ENFIN, un chef de gouvernement anglais qui parle le français! Mais rappelez-vous, nos chers français, ce que le petit caporal nous a appelé une nation de commerçants. Ce matin nous nous demandons: ce M Blair, est-il vraiment notre premier ministre ou - déguisé - un espèce de négociant, un agent d'influence étrangère, le délégué d'une société privée, l'entreprise internationale gérée par Rupert Murdoch.

Yet it's not the French who need to beware but the Italians. The Euro-linus buzz with reports that the British prime minister has been lobbying Romano Prodi on behalf of Murdoch Enterprises Inc. Could it be that Mr Blair is moonlighting as a lobbyist? There will be those, especially in France, who will say: this is what British membership of the European Union amounts to. It confirms that Charles de Gaulle was right all along and all we are is a kind of Trojan Horse for American interests.

Downing Street denies there is anything in the story that Mr Blair wooed Mr Prodi. Media ownership is a touchy subject in modern Italian politics and there can be few who think substituting Murdoch for Berlusconi would constitute an increase in pluralism. The Prodi government has enough on its hands, what with getting Italy fit for EMU, without having to counter allegations that it is permitting foreign meddling.

As for Mr Blair, let us hope that, if Murdoch asked him to intervene, he had the good sense to say no. To sit on his hands while Rupert Murdoch pursues a predatory pricing policy in newspaper markets in this country is one thing. But for the prime minister of the United Kingdom to tout on Murdoch's behalf abroad would be of a shockingly different order of magnitude.



Fees for students

ANDREAS Whitman Smith's "Confessions of a student in the golden era" (24 March) play into the hands of those who would happily turn education into an entirely commercial business rather than viewing it as part of a national strategy. He also reveals a touching naivety.

Many of us who went to university without having to pay directly to do so understood perfectly well where the money for our education came from. It was provided because the nation recognised it needed a skilled workforce of trained graduates - to govern, to build infrastructure, to make sick people well, and to develop goods for export. My fellow students and I studied how to design vital new homes, schools and hospitals, while our colleagues were similarly training in engineering, science or medicine. The money was found so we could learn how to create national wealth and improve the quality of life.

Our student grants may have covered the basics of sharing a student flat in a Liverpool back street, but our lifestyles were hardly luxurious. Meanwhile, many of our contemporaries were already earning their own income, marrying, buying homes and starting families, while we deferred those ambitions to complete our training. We were willing to do so in the belief that we would be compensated later through higher than average earnings. But we also understood that we would then pay more income tax which, in turn, would be used (in part) for our universities to educate future generations.

These notions of national goals and inter-generational relationships seem to have been lost in arguments about costs and benefits to the individual, and Andreas Whitman Smith's confessions about his own limited motives in going to university do little to remind us of the bigger picture.

SEBASTIAN MACMILLAN
Architect
Cambridge

Models of citizenship

I COULDN'T agree more that we need "citizenship for a new generation" (leading article, 24 March). Unfortunately, the models of citizenship currently running for candidacy are usually far from suitable.

It is an over-expressed fallacy that the youth of today has no interest in politics. This misconception leads to the inevitable next step of questioning how we can encourage our young citizens to become politically active: to vote, stand for council and use all the traditionally accepted avenues for expression of active citizenship.

Why is it that politicians and educationists cannot see that whilst they ask themselves these questions in stuffy offices, our young citizens are out there actively engaging in a new kind of politics? A "globalised" world is offering new opportunities to become politically active in ways which are no longer by necessity tied to the structure of the nation state or formal politics. For example, environmental dangers and a growing demand for some form of standardisation of human rights, offer communities and individuals an opportunity to act locally on global imperatives.

LETTERS

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number.
Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

THE letter from Diana Warwick (23 March) demonstrates, perhaps unintentionally, just how unfair and poorly thought-out the new system of higher education funding will be. Repayments on a loan will indeed depend on the graduate's personal circumstances - but the amount to be repaid will depend on the parents' income. How can it possibly be acceptable that two colleagues in their thirties, with the same income, may be paying very different loan repayments because of their parents' relative prosperity 15 years earlier?

IAN JOHNSTON
College Lecturer in Engineering Science
Brisnase College, Oxford

Cook was right

THE coverage of the Foreign Secretary's visit to Jerusalem has been a depressing demonstration of the extent to which the basic issues at the heart of the Israel/Palestinian conflict remain obscured by Israel's success in setting the terms of debate. Can we remind ourselves of just a few facts?

First, the acceptance by the Palestinians of a two-state solution to the conflict is itself a massive compromise on their part - Israel is built on what was Palestinian territory, with millions of refugees from that territory, and their dependants, now scattered around the world and Benjamin Netanyahu's government adamant that they will not be allowed to return.

Second, the United Nations, in line with international law, considers the land acquired by force in 1967 to be occupied territory, and the Israeli settlements built there illegal. Third, the Oslo Accords signed by the government of Israel expressly prohibit further settlement-building, pending a final agreement by the parties to the conflict.

In the light of this, and much more, Robin Cook's actions on behalf of the European Union in visiting a settlement site and shaking the hand of an elected Palestinian representative is

surely a welcome (if small) gesture of fairness towards a people who are continuing to pay very dearly for what Europeans, not Palestinians, did to the Jewish people during the 20th century. If a genuine and lasting resolution of the conflict is to be achieved, which is in the interests of the Israeli people as much as anyone, then actions such as Mr Cook's - and a good deal more - are essential.

BILL SPIERS
Deputy General Secretary
Scottish Trades Union Congress
Glasgow

Church investment

I WONDER whether Bishop Belo of East Timor would share the Church Commissioners' view (report, 23 March) that it is acceptable for the Church of England to invest in companies such as British Aerospace, whose sale of weapons to the Indonesian government has contributed to the slaughter of so many Timorese people, just because they also manufacture commercial aeroplanes?

Aaron Kataria's spurious explanation that the Commissioners' concern is that their investments are not made in companies who are "wholly or mainly in [the defence] business" is morally indefensible. Did they not bother to read BAE's 1996 Annual Report, which stated that 60 per cent of their previous year's manufacturing was of military equipment?

JAMES SAVAGE
London SW6

I WAS interested to read that none of the Church of England investors in arms firms said that they intended to use their influence as shareholders to persuade the firms to make ploughshares instead.

CHRIS TOLLEY
Basingstoke, Hampshire

TV sports coverage

SPORT on television arouses strong emotions and the reaction of some to the publication of the Report of the Advisory Group on Listed Events, which I chaired, may have aroused unnecessary fears among sports lovers who are not subscribers to cable or satellite channels (report, 21 March).

Before appointing the Advisory Group, the Secretary of State consulted widely on the criteria to be taken into account in deciding whether or not to list an event. In order to be eligible for listing, an event must meet the following main criterion:

the event has a special national resonance, not simply a significance to those who ordinarily follow the sport concerned; it is an event which serves to unite the nation; a shared point on the national calendar.

Test cricket, whatever its importance, can hardly be described as a shared point on the national calendar - it is virtually a shared summer - and it is difficult to apply different criteria to premier league football and Test cricket.

The B list actually creates much more protection for the average viewer than was previously available. I accept that secondary coverage - limited live coverage, delayed as-live transmission or edited highlights - is not as good as full live coverage but it does represent a considerable improvement on the current position where, if an event is not listed, the non-satellite viewer is not guaranteed coverage.

Much greater protection will be afforded to the average viewer if the Secretary of State decides to endorse our recommendations.

LORD GORDON OF STRATHBLANE
House of Lords, London SW1

Through the looking-glass

COULD Lewis Carroll have invented a situation where, according to recent advertisements, you can save £100 a year by buying your electricity from gas companies and another £100 by buying your gas from electricity companies?

JIM TATCHELL
Wokingham, Berkshire



MILES KINGTON

What's the funniest part of the joke: the words, the timing, or the lack of laughter?

THERE has been a small exchange of correspondence recently in this paper about the famous though perhaps not very well-known Jack Benny radio sketch in which a mugger stops the notoriously mean comedian Jack Benny and says "Your money or your life?" and the notoriously mean Jack Benny says nothing and the mugger says, "Well?" and the notoriously mean Jack Benny says, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking", or words to that effect.

What the correspondents were arguing about, I think, was why it was so funny - was the line funny? was the silence funny? was it a sketch or a one-liner? - and I am in the odd position that I should be able to settle all arguments, because I have actually heard that Jack Benny sketch. I don't mean I heard it when it first went out, which was in the 1930s, some while before I was born, but that I heard it when I visited the Museum of Broadcasting in New York a few years ago. This is where they keep all the famous TV moments, the

historic moon walks, the great shows of yesteryear, blah blah blah, but where they also keep the great moments of radio.

Now, I am just about old enough to remember the first great radio stars, if only from the era when they were being turned into aged TV stars - my Dad was always watching the Jack Benny Show, and George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Bob Hope, and Vic Oliver, and I watched along with him - so I do feel some link with that golden age. I know that Vic Oliver played the violin badly and spoke English curiously. I know that Jack Benny also played the violin badly and in addition was mean, and had a black valet named Rochester. Indeed, I knew about Jack Benny's Rochester before I had ever heard of the Brontës' Rochester...

So even when young I could understand the joke when Bob Hope said: "Jack Benny is the meanest man I know. That man is so mean that... Why, I was having dinner with him the other night, and when the

waiter brought the check, he tried to hide in the toilet! But I wouldn't let him in..."

Funny, eh? Well, it was funny back then. But this explains why I do remember being told about this famous moment when the mugger stopped Jack Benny and said, "Your money or your life?", so when they said to me at the Museum of Broadcasting that I could choose a clip from the past, any clip I liked, I ignored things like the Kennedy assassination and went straight for that one. I had heard about it so much and yet I had never actually heard it.

And sure enough they had it, and I listened to it, and it was much as you might imagine, apart from the extra crackles. The robber did stop Jack Benny and did suggest a choice between life and money and Jack Benny did pause an awful long time and made it clear he couldn't make up his mind which was more important, his life or his money, which is a very funny idea, but what came across on this old clip was something which nobody had ever told me

about and which came as a dreadful shock: the audience didn't laugh much at it. Sure, there was a bit of a titter, but no belly laugh, no chorus of roaring, no sign that this was one of the great moments of radio. Just a slight, polite ripple of chuckles. Here was this great comedy moment and all those who were privileged to be there didn't know it was a great comedy moment. It was like being transported back into the Globe Theatre by a time machine to see a Shakespeare play and discovering that everyone was eating nuts and flirting, and nobody listening.

Maybe that's part of the reason that radio comedies these days so rarely have live audiences. Television comedies very often still have audiences, but then TV comedy is much more old-fashioned than radio comedy. Radio has learnt how to be funny without an audience. The chunk of comedy that appears on Radio 4 on Wednesday nights under the title of *Late Night Opening* is a good example. There are three programmes involved, "Armstrong and

Miller", "The World of Pub", and "Life, Death and Sex with Mike and Sue", and only the last-named has an audience. Well, being a pastiche of a chat show, I suppose it has to. But the other two move so fast and are so intricate that an audience would only get in the way.

All three are pretty funny, funnier than most TV comedy, but "The World of Pub", which I have only just discovered, is something else - breathtakingly inventive, quick-thinking, allusive and so fast to bounce off its own references that an audience reaction would only get in the way. It's written by someone called Tony Roche. I don't know who Tony Roche is, but if ever someone comes to him and says, "You've got a really funny show there, Tony - why don't you try and get it on TV?", I hope he turns round and says, "Forget it. TV's not ready for a REALLY fast show. Besides, we'd probably have to have an audience on TV and they might not laugh and how would that sound in the Museum of Broadcasting?"

Dr. J. C. 10.15.20

What the Arts Council could learn from the Medicis



ANNE
MCELVOY
BUSINESS ACUMEN
IN THE ARTS

SO THE Arts Council is about to be massacred by its new chairman, Gerry Robinson: "a shark in a Val Doonican pullover", muttered one disgruntled member, proving that whatever their other shortcomings, they mix their metaphors very creatively in the world of arts funding. Mr Robinson is one of those people with a talent for producing invective in others. John Cleese famously sent a fax to him at Granada television after he replaced the head of the channel with an accountant, "F*** off out of it you ignorant upstart caterer."

Mr Robinson's reply went unrecorded. He could have pointed out upstart entrepreneurs have always been the bedrock of the arts, from the Medicis to the Rothschilds, the Tates and the Saatchis. So far, Mr Robinson's most bloody-thirsty suggestion has been that the 23-strong council should be slimmed down and replaced by a Council of 10. Anyone who has tried to reach agreement on anything with a body of over 10 people on will sympathise with his instinct. It is perfectly good practice, in arts administration as in business, to trim central councils, which tend, like the universe, to expand infinitely.

But the hollering has been predictably robust. The Earl of Clancarty, a powerful member of the Council saw in it "another symptom of the Government stacking arts areas with business and management people who misunderstand how the arts work and are only interested in financial efficiency". This, you may have noticed, is an almost exact inversion of Gerald Kaufman's brusque summary of his hopes for the future administration of the Royal Opera House: namely that a philistine would do as long as he knew how to read a balance sheet.

Both of these viewpoints are caricatures of the truth, knee-jerk responses of one clan to another and as ill-considered and tribally biased as the football fan's assessment of the opposing team's game. That the debate about the arts in Britain is conducted in such a pantomime way reflects badly on our existing institutions. The desire to drive a wedge between commerce and culture is a foolish and unproductive one. Those who seek to imply that businessmen misunderstand the arts, because they are lost in dreams of their profit margins during the last act of *Meistertrager*, are perfectly matched against the Kaufmans (all right, he was sending himself up a little in that report, but not that much) who want to knee-cap the genteel folk of Covent Garden and put in a Rachmann to run the ROH.

Without patronage, the arts become a mere subsidised branch of the government, reflecting the taste of a not very imaginative elite. The affection of the Blairite *beau monde* for British art is an example of the way established tastes follow - a few years on - the risky investments of private patrons (like

Charles Saatchi, in talents like Damien Hirst). When the rich nobleman Maecenas bought into Horace, Virgil and Propertius, his tastes were doubtless considered controversial. It is rarely public funding alone that provides the impulse for new and daring art. Individuals have hunches and instincts. Regional arts funding bodies play safe.

Anyway, few galleries have resources now for collecting contemporary works. Artists bemoan this because, like most people, they prefer a financially stable existence to a hand-to-mouth one. But as Tony Blair prosaically reminds us: we live in the "real world", and in the real world, however passionately you argue that the arts are as important as hospitals and drains, you will have difficulty making this case against the majority of people who want to secure their publicly-funded hip replacements and cheap, clean water before they fund their local theatre.

Mr Robinson is alive to this worry. He does not believe that the Arts Council in its present form, is able to deliver answers. He is a Lord High Executioner bringing the axe of the downsizer down on the necks of quite a few formerly important people. The question is whether any of them will be missed.

Picking through the evidence so far, it emerges that his instinct is to simplify the Arts Council into a policy body and leave the regions to distribute their own funds. He also seeks to heal the division between the subsidised and commercial sectors and to end the tendency of the Council to invest in buildings rather than people. This - and not only the businessman's traditional fetish of admiring other businessmen - is why he is seeking to put more entrepreneurs on the board. Let us see whether they deliver before we carp further.

There is a version of the public versus business funding argument which concludes that the arts do not need public money at all and that any music, drama or pictures worth their salt will survive in a purely market economy. It isn't necessarily so. As Günter Grass pointed out in an essay mocking the art collections of Frankfurt banks, commercial sponsors of sculpture share a single aesthetic: "An abstract, but of course unthreatening, one, which produces circular structures in economic-ecological symbiosis representing the endless circulation of the patron's wealth."

We need to maintain a mixed economy in the arts because that is the best available guarantee of a breadth of investment and infrastructural support. But the tired old sniping of the subsidised sector against the commercial must end. The future lies in partnership between the two.

Two worrying silences remain. The first is the regions. It is impossible to construct a consistent national policy for the arts without addressing the problems of neglect in the regional theatres and concert halls. The lottery has been marvellous at promoting *grands projets* - far less good at targeting more modest institutions which need help with their heating and cleaning bills. Without the wider tax relief on arts donations (campaigning for by this newspaper), regional art bodies face a daunting task in raising revenue for day to day upkeep.

The second is the *quid pro quo* for most business sponsors is a generous allocation of tickets for their clients - which in turn restricts public access to the performances and causes resentment among the many people who rightly believe that it is the responsibility of a Labour Government to increase that access.

Mr Robinson's fellow upstarts will find that their problem-solving skills, as well as their understanding of balance sheets, much in demand at the new, leaner Arts Council.

In Whitehall they're beginning to murmur: 'Dead Man Walking'



ANDREW
MARR
THE COMING
RESHUFFLE

THE scene is Whitehall. A murmur rises through the grimy corridors and waiting rooms, just audible above the traffic noise outside. The murmur is passed from secretary to deputy secretary, from messenger to private office. And the murmur goes: "Dead Man Walking". In the minister's office, the white-faced minister, hearing it clearly, fiddles at his tie-knot and adjusts his jaw before stepping outside. But all the bravado in the world can't hide the fact that, politically speaking, the minister is dead.

I exaggerate, of course. But the political season is moving towards reshuffle time and already government is awash with speculation about who is out, who down, and who in.

This is a grisly spectacle, one of the few forms of public execution (and, for sensitive ministers, public torture) still sanctioned by a liberal state. But it is probably necessary to our system: prime ministers must be good butchers of their colleagues. And now, quite soon, it is Tony Blair's turn to demonstrate how he will cope.

After weekend stories that the Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson, was to be moved soon from the Treasury, Mr Blair's press secretary displaying the gift for modest understatement for which he is becoming famous - described the reports as "The junk food of political journalism", adding, for those who hadn't caught his drift, "All reshuffle stories are crap." Well, fine. But if there is no reshuffle in the spring, it will merely be because it is coming in summer instead.

Of recent prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher was a self-confessed bad butcher. She cut away the wets, though not speedily, during her early years. Later on, though, she was too slow and insufficiently ruthless - despite her reputation. She was sentimental about supposed ideological supporters, even when they were bad ministers, and worried about how families would take the news.

When John Major arrived, much was made of a new dis-



Good PMs are good butchers: Blair must prepare to be brutal

Brian Harris

pensation, in which there would be little reshuffling, so that ministers had two, three or four years of guaranteed office in which to master their departments and show what they could do. That, too, failed as a strategy. Weak ministers were left too long. The resignations and firings were often forced on Major - as with David Mellor - or came suddenly and bitterly, as with Norman Lamont. In general, his reshuffles probably weakened rather than strengthened the prime minister.

Tony Blair will have learned from those years. In opposition, he was always an intent observer of political decline. Now, he has to prune away the poorer performers and use new ministerial hirings to sharpen the country's perception of what his government is all about. Reshuffles are moments of truth. Up to a point, they do for prime ministers what budgets do for chancellors.

But whenever it comes, my predictions are that Blair will be a tough and unsentimental reshuffler, and that his changes will not please the press.

It would be so easy, wouldn't it, to conjure a great whoosh of

happy headlines by, for instance, dropping the Lord Chancellor and his wallpaper hill: or booting out Peter Mandelson from the Dome project and sending him to the Siberia of a "proper job" working for John Prescott; or even firing the Foreign Secretary, whose personal life and spiky public image have not endeared him to Middle Britain.

Pandering to the prejudices of hacks would, however, be a sign of weakness. Blair knows, from the Conservative experience, how the scent of blood merely encourages the journalistic frenzy. His focus, instead, has been relentlessly on performance: how well does X or Y do the actual job? No administration as media-obsessed as this one can have enjoyed the publicity created by some of the less popular ministers. But they won't be sacked because of it.

Nor will there be a grand political gesture. The obvious one would be to persuade Robin Cook to leave the gilded corridors of the Foreign Office and grab the constitutional reform agenda, becoming super-minister for devolution, rights, reform of the Lords and Commons and European political reform.

This would give an essential boost to a key part of the Government's programme that has come to seem diffuse, unhelped and haphazard. Cook is a genuine intellectual enthusiast for reform, and on the radical wing of the party. Giving him an overlord role, like John Prescott's, would be an imaginative stroke.

It is also, however, going to remain a columnist's fantasy. Like Derry Irvine, Gordon Brown and Jack Straw, Cook is judged to have performed very well by Number Ten. The diplomatic messages from other European capitals, and from around the world, are very different in tone from the press complaints about an arrogant and clumsy amateur: his peers regard him as an excellent negotiator with a fine command of detail. Those of us who think that Cook has it in him to be more than that will have to wait.

So what will the reshuffle be like when it finally comes? Expect quite a lot of lesser heads

to roll. Blair needs to demonstrate that he is a tough leader. A year into the first Labour administration for ages, he will remove all those people who came into government by virtue of their shadow cabinet vote and who have failed to shine since. David Clark and Gavin Strang are two decent, hardworking cabinet ministers who are probably for the chop on that basis; but so are many more junior people.

The tougher questions are about the future of Frank Dobson at health and Harriet Harman at social security. Dobson will have to deliver on his 100,000 cut in waiting lists to survive. Harman, meanwhile, has powerful enemies in Downing Street, and not only because of the serious mistakes in cutting lone parents' allowances and in opening the debate on disability payments. But she has had Gordon Brown as a powerful political protector - because, say cynics, she allows him to run her department as a proxy of the Treasury. If so, Brown has done her no great favours since her survival would be seen in the party as a victory for the Brownites and therefore, perhaps, a sign of prime ministerial weakness.

What, finally, of the most media-magnetic personality of them all, Peter Mandelson? He is judged to be ready for promotion but there is the huge problem of the Dome. Though some of the project's creative people think it is being badly damaged by association with him, to move Mandelson away from it now would be some kind of concession of failure. I don't think either Mandelson or Blair would go for that.

He could of course take over either the culture department, headed by Chris Smith, or the cabinet office and machinery of government job now done by David Clark, and keep the Dome too. And given the power-play inside New Labour, any reshuffle which had nothing to say about Mandelson would be very odd indeed.

The cabinet office job would be the shrewder move, since the relationship between Number Ten and the rest of Whitehall is far from perfect - and a proposal for reworking it was one of the ideas in Mandelson's pre-election book. Further, that personal strengthening of the Blair's grip is really what this first reshuffle will be all about. He must cut to reshape, and destroy careers to strengthen his project. It will be a grisly rite of passage but after it, Britain will have just a little less Tony, and a little more Prime Minister.

Jobs will soon be flexible, fulfilling and fun



HAMISH
MCRAE
THE FUTURE
OF WORK

SO WE are all going to work. A week ago Gordon Brown announced changes to the tax and National Insurance systems to try to reduce the barriers that discourage people from taking jobs. This week Frank Field has outlined proposals to change the benefits system which will have a similar effect.

If the present government does have a big idea, it is that we should become a "high work" society. That is not to criticise the notion. Indeed given the adverse demographic headwind into which all developed countries will be butting, the only way in we will be able to increase living standards over the next generation will be to get just about everyone who can work into some kind of eco-

nomie activity. It will be the only way we will be able both to support the growing army of pensioners without a sharp, and probably unsustainable, rise in the taxation burden.

In fact we are already quite a high work society. Britain is like the US and Japan in the proportion of people of working age (16-64) that are in the labour force - they either have some kind of job or they are looking for one. The US has the highest proportion, over 79 per cent in 1996, while Japan and Britain tied with more than 77 per cent. By contrast, the average for Germany, France Italy and Spain was only 66 per cent.

But if we are - by developed country standards - quite good at getting people who can work into work, I'm not so sure that we are good at tailoring the jobs so that the jobs are flexible, fulfilling and fun. We see the problem in macro-economic or public finance terms because it is obviously a problem for human beings. Governments can remove obstacles to work by improving the tax system and they can bully people into it by adjusting the benefits system. They cannot make jobs nicer.

That surely is more important than anything else. If we are going to move to an even higher-work society than we are now, where there is considerable social, moral and financial pres-

sure on people to do some sort of work, then the only way to make that tolerable is to try to make work more enjoyable.

Ridiculous? As an aim to strive for, of course not: many people, maybe most people, find the social interaction of the workplace one of the great attractions of doing a job. In practice there will inevitably be unpleasant jobs that need to be done. The onus is surely on employers to try to fine-tune work practices. "The trick," as Robert

If we are going to move to a higher-work society, then the only way to make that tolerable is to try to make work more enjoyable

Louis Stevenson put it, "is the make the laughter outweigh the tears."

Enlightened employers know this. Here are three random examples. Just last week thousands of US students headed to Florida for the annual spring break - the traditional endeavour of partying and boozing which used to take place at Fort Lauderdale and now has moved up to Daytona Beach. Thanks to the long US boom, American companies are desperate for good graduates. So

what did they do? A number of top US companies, including IBM, set up stalls on the beach, handed out flyers about the careers they had on offer, gave out \$5 tokens for refreshments and interviewed people. They even signed a few up, but that was not the aim. The aim was to present themselves as relaxed and flexible places to work, because they knew that was the way to get the best applicants.

Another example is here in London. Most people moving

home want to look at houses at the weekend. But estate agents also need to staff their offices at weekend. So they use sixth-formers to help show people round: meet people at the house, let them in, go round with them and make sure it is locked up afterwards. The sixth-formers get some money and have a reasonably interesting day, and the job gets done. It is clever use of - as economists would say - marginal labour.

A third example is the way several of our supermarket

chains have special programmes to attract older workers who have taken early retirement. Naturally they tailor the hours to suit the person, and they have found that provided they are flexible in the terms they offer they can get particularly competent people to come and work.

This is only the beginning - small signs that good employers are aware that we are heading into a world where corporate competitive advantage requires a flexible approach to hiring. I would expect several big trends to become much more evident over the next ten years. In particular five barriers or frontiers will be broken down.

First, the frontier between full-time and part-time work will become even more blurred. Clever companies will learn to use efficiently whatever time they can buy from trained people. Managing a flexible workforce, with lots of part-timers, is much more complicated than organising full-timers, but there are great potential gains in efficiency if it is done well.

Next, the frontier between retirement and paid work will also soften, with it becoming normal (as it is in Japan) for people to "retire" and then move straight into some other kind of work, perhaps part-time.

Third, the frontier between learning and work will become

much weaker. It will be normal for young people in what we now think of as full-time education to do some kind of work. It will be normal for people in full-time work to carry on being educated at the same time. Both student and work schedules will need to accommodate this.

Fourth, the distinction between paid work and voluntary work will tend to disappear. More people will carry out some kind of voluntary work, regarding this as part of their normal life, alongside their paid activities. Meanwhile more voluntary work will be partly-paid, that is not at full commercial rates.

Finally the frontier between employment and self-employment will become much less clear-cut. People will work for the majority of their time with an employer, but will have their own private commercial activities alongside this. Both sides will need to be frank with each other to make sure that these sort of relationships benefit everyone.

All this makes management more difficult. It is much harder to run bottom-up flexible organisations, than top-down command and control ones. But the plain fact is that this is a commercial necessity given the changing shape and aspirations of the work-force. Besides, what is wrong with trying to make work more fun?

Third, the frontier between learning and work will become

BRITAIN'S LEADING YAMAHA DEALER



Trusted for generations by professional and amateur musicians alike for the finest choice of instruments and printed music, backed up by a standard of service that's legendary, that's Chappell.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Chappell stores offer the widest choice of Yamaha instruments in the UK, from the first School Recorder to a magnificent hand crafted Grand Piano.

And if you think the best from the best must be expensive, you're probably in for a pleasant surprise. Our Price Match Promise ensures that Chappell always offer exceptional value.

Price Match does not include all items or apply to special offers. Products must be new, unused and available in stock from a bona fide Yamaha dealer.

Chappell
of Bond Street

50 New Bond Street, London W1Y 9HA. Telephone 020 7493 976. Also at Milton Keynes Shopping Centre. Telephone 0500 003909.

Chemist joins the queue of high street retailers offering financial services with instant health and travel cover.

Boots targets £1bn market for insurance

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

BOOTS the Chemists yesterday launched an assault on Britain's £1bn insurance market with a new range of policies covering health and travel. The initiative is the latest in a series of moves into financial services by Britain's best-known high street retailers. Marks & Spencer has been offering pensions and loans for years while supermarkets such as Tesco, J Sainsbury and Sainsbury have launched telephone banking services and other financial products.

But Boots insisted its move into insurance was not a prelude to a "Boots Bank" and that it would not offer private medical insurance.

Steve Russell, managing director of Boots the Chemist, said: "The move is a natural extension of the Boots brand and our overall offer to customers. It takes us into a market which is a natural fit for us and which represents a real commercial opportunity."

Boots is teaming up with Royal & Sun Alliance to offer five health insurance policies aimed at family health, pregnancy, dental health, child injury and accident. In addition, there are four travel policies covering single trips or year-round cover as well as a "Gap Year" policy aimed at students working or travelling abroad during their year off between school and university. Royal & Sun will provide the underwriting and claims services and carry the insurance risk.

Boots, led by executive chairman Lord Blyth, aims to demystify the purchase of insurance by keeping its literature and sales methods simple. The policies go on sale in 250 of the largest stores from 15 April. Customers will be able to fill in forms in the



Lord Blyth, Boots chairman

stores and pay for cover which takes effect instantly.

The launch will be backed by a £20m marketing budget, including big in-store promotions. Boots hopes to sell 250,000 policies in the first year and 1 million after five. It claims the business will break even in year one. Boots claimed its prices to be highly competitive.

The dental plan costs £7 a month under the NHS system or £15 per month under a private plan.

The pregnancy policy costs £95 and enables holders to ring a 24-hour information line to talk to qualified midwives and nurses. There is cash for multiple births and additional stays in hospital.

In travel insurance, an annual policy for a family is priced at £89 for a single person and £140 for a family.

Boots said its research on customers' shopping habits

showed that after Christmas a high proportion were seeking travel-related products such as sun tan lotion and sunglasses.

Analysts welcomed the move saying it was a logical way for Boots to leverage its brand in the health and travel markets. "There is a logical link between selling tanning lotion and travel insurance," said John Richards at NatWest Securities. "If you have a brand with enormous loyalty then you have the opportunity to cross-sell other products."

Ashley Thomas at SG Securities agreed that it was a positive move but warned that Boots should not stretch itself too far. "They obviously have to be careful not to dilute the brand so they don't stretch it too much. I wouldn't want Boots to suddenly go into estate agency or travel."

Another analyst said the move could be good news for consumers who have been angered by travel agents which insist on the purchase of insurance from them when booking holidays. Many consumers have feared they were not being offered the best deal.

Boots' policies will include a 30-day cooling off period and accrue points on the stores' Advantage loyalty card, which was launched last year. Boots shares rose 12.5p to 918p.

Additional reporting by Kerry Benefield

Off-the-shelf financial services



On the cards: The Post Office's new chairman, Neville Bain, asked the Government for more commercial freedom as he announced a freeze on stamp prices until April 1999 yesterday. Photograph: Philip Meech

Post Office sell-off still possible

By Michael Harrison

PRIVATISATION of the Post Office is still on the agenda, its new chairman said yesterday as he urged the Government to give the organisation its commercial freedom.

Speaking as the Post Office announced a freeze on first and second class letter prices until at least April of next year, Neville Bain said the Government's review of the Post Office was examining all means of giving the business commercial freedom. "All forms of commercialisation including privatisation will be considered," he said.

Margaret Beckett, the President of the Board of Trade, is thought to have opposed any direct sell-off of part of the Post Office. But the Treasury is much keener on some form of partial privatisation which would bring in revenue and allow

the Post Office to compete with overseas competitors. A partial sale of up to 50 per cent of the business could raise £2bn.

Mr Bain, who became chairman last week, warned that if the Government continued to milk the Post Office for profit without giving it more commercial freedom, then the value of the business would halve from its present level of £3.25bn in the next five years.

The amount of cash the Treasury extracts from the Post Office through its External Financing Limit is due to rise from £330m in the current financial year to £335m next year and £345m in 1999-2000.

John Roberts, the Post Office's chief executive, said it was disappointing that the review had not yet been completed, adding that he hoped it would be published before the summer recess.

The Post Office is pressing for the right

to enter joint ventures with private partners, raise funding on the private market and offer a wider range of services, such as insurance, across its Counters network.

Previously, the Post Office has warned that lack of commercial freedom and increasing cash demands on it from the Treasury would affect investment levels and its ability to hold prices.

Mr Roberts said that the latest freeze on letter prices had been made possible by volume growth and efficiency gains. The amount of post being handled is rising by 4.5 per cent a year while investment in the coming year is likely to be a little higher than last year's £408m.

Letter prices have not risen since July 1996. The decision to keep them on hold until at least next April means that prices will have stayed frozen for 33 months - the longest period since the 1960s.

Halifax anger at 'farcical' Midshires battle

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

HALIFAX yesterday said the bid battle for Birmingham Midshires had descended into farce as the building society dramatically reneged on an eight-month old agreement to sell the society to Royal Bank of Scotland for £630m.

Mike Jackson, chief executive of Birmingham Midshires, said the RBS offer was no longer high enough, given a 50 per cent rise in the value of retail banks since last August, when the deal was struck.

"Given the advice which the society has received, the board cannot now recommend that our members vote in favour of a transfer at a price which we no longer believe to be fair and reasonable."

The society's U-turn means the prospect of a windfall worth £630 each to the society's 1 million members has temporarily been withdrawn.

The Building Societies Commission said details of the RBS offer could not be put to members without the board's recommendation.

Both Birmingham Midshires and Halifax yesterday called for RBS to release Midshires from a legally binding agreement which blocks the society from discussing other bids. Halifax has offered £780m, potentially boosting windfalls by at least £150 each.

Gary Marsh, director of corporate affairs at Halifax, said: "It's a farcical situation that in a sense is becoming more farcical."

"They are not recommending the RBS offer, the RBS are saying they are considering their position, and the society can't send [an offer] to its members. RBS should recognise reality and withdraw."

Royal Bank of Scotland hit back by indicating it would consider legal action over the deal - action which could force Midshires to stick with the lower offer or block it from handing out windfalls.

Consumer groups protest as P&O fares surge after link-up

By Terry Macalister

P&O yesterday upset consumer groups by signalling a determination to push up fares by 50 per cent on its Channel ferry routes after its tie-up with rival Stena Line.

Graeme Dunlop, P&O ferry boss, said that passenger and freight fares had already been raised 6 per cent and 12 per cent respectively this year.

Asked about further scope for increases, he said: "There is that possibility." Lord Sterling, P&O chairman, added that it was "logical" for prices to move back upwards.

The Consumers Association said: "We said at the time that joint operations would reduce choice for consumers and lead to higher prices. That view seems to be confirmed."

The 1998 rates will be kept at the current level introduced on 1 January, partly because

brochures with this year's prices have been published. But P&O says it needed further increases to make up for a 50 per cent drop in short sea rates between 1994 and 1997 when the Channel Tunnel opened.

A fire which halted Tunnel traffic was partly responsible for P&O Ferries producing a significant increase in 1997 operating profits of £67.7m for the 12 month period. That helped produce a better-than-expected P&O group increase of 30 per cent in pre-tax profits, to £433.9m.

But one third of ferry revenues came from shipboard sales and P&O is presuming the European Union will abolish duty free sales next year.

P&O and Stena have a free hand to raise their fares over the next three years, under the terms of EU approval for the joint operation. But P&O says that there are also great

opportunities to cut costs. Meanwhile Lord Sterling revealed that a new joint venture between P&O's bulk shipping interests with Sheungwan Group of China could be floated as a separate company.

It would be natural to move the joint venture, to be called ABC, away from the umbrella of P&O by way of an Initial Public Offering on Hong Kong and US stock markets, he said.

Lord Sterling also used a presentation for P&O's 1997 financial results to indicate that shareholders could be in line for an increased dividend over the coming 12 months.

The 30.5p dividend held for the last five years in the face of mounting City criticism had probably been set too high in 1992, he said. It was "something we will be re-examining" in the light of the company's increasingly buoyant position, he added.

US bid for Spandex nets founders £58m

By Terry Macalister

A husband and wife team that founded a sign-making equipment company 22 years ago are poised to share £57.9m between them after an agreed bid from a US buyer.

Charles Dobson and his wife, Mary, established Spandex in 1976 to market a range of signs systems they had designed together. Their big break was to win exclusive UK distribution rights to an American letter cutting computer distributed in the US by Gerber Scientific Inc.

Now Gerber has made a £109.2m deal to buy out Spandex. This means Mr Dobson, Spandex chairman, and his director wife obtain 32.5p for each of the 17.8 million shares they collectively own. Edmund Bruegger, the managing direc-



Charles and Mary Dobson: Founded Spandex 22 years ago

tor, will make £68.250 from his shares.

Gerber has irrevocable undertakings from 54.5 per cent of the total issued share capital of Spandex, which was floated on the Unlisted Securities Market in 1986.

Mr Bruegger said he and Mr Dobson expected to continue in

their roles "for the foreseeable future" but said Mrs Dobson might stand down.

Spandex's operations have suffered from maturing European markets. Profits on turnover of £101m last year dropped to £9m from £9.9m for 1996, mainly due to the effect of the strong pound.

The UK Index-Tracking PEP

Highest

* The All-Share Tracking PEP that's charged the least, has performed the best.

0500 11 66 22

Legal & General

PLEASE QUOTE REF: C4D722

* "Highest" is based on an index of all UK index-tracking PEPs with gross income calculated from 01.10.97 to 01.10.98. The index is based on the performance of the All-Share Tracking PEP, which has the lowest charges. The index is based on the performance of the All-Share Tracking PEP, which has the lowest charges. The index is based on the performance of the All-Share Tracking PEP, which has the lowest charges.

informative:

Withdrawal of Visa Card Points Programme

The First Direct Visa Card Points Programme and First Direct Premier Visa Card Points Programme are being withdrawn with effect from 1 July 1998.

Cardholders will have until their July statement date to collect further points and until 31 October 1998 to redeem their points.

Further details will be issued with the next First Direct Visa or Premier Visa statement.

First Direct is a division of Midland Bank plc. Member HSBC Group

STOCK MARKETS

Indices	Close	Change	Close	Change	Close	Change
FTSE 100	5983.70	+36.70	Dow Jones	8105.00	+108.10	+3.27
FTSE 250	5523.30	+2.20	Nikkei	1410.30	+12.20	+0.86
FTSE 350	2872.20	+1.10				
FTSE All Share	2796.85	+13.13				
FTSE Smallcap	2812.80	+3.30				
FTSE Premier	1410.30	+12.20				
FTSE Asia	1069.50	+0.50				
FTSE Europe	8571.70	+85.40				
FTSE Japan	1069.50	+0.50				
FTSE Korea	1102.45	+11.10				
FTSE Hong Kong	5221.24	+50.00				

INTEREST RATES

Short sterling	UK 18 year gilt	US long bond
3 month 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
6 month 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
1 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
2 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
3 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
4 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
5 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
6 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
7 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
8 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
9 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93
10 year 1.19	10 year 5.90	10 year 5.93

CURRENCIES

£/€	DM/£	¥/£
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189
1.6735	1.6189	1.6189

www.bloomberg.com/uk source: Bloomberg

صباحنا من الامل



JEREMY WARNER

ON WHY NATIONAL CHAMPIONS IN BUSINESS MAKE BAD POLICY, WHO CONVERSION IS REALLY GOOD FOR, AND THE LESSONS OF TOONGATE

Cool Britannia gives way to Crony Britannia

TONY BLAIR seems to have a particular liking for corporate deal making, doesn't he? Whether it was Mr Blair who got on the blower to Romano Prodi, or as Downing Street would have us believe, the other way round, Mr Blair certainly seems to have put in some kind of a plea for his friend and supporter, Rupert Murdoch, who at the time was trying to buy Silvio Berlusconi's Italian TV networks. Well, he's only human, isn't he? So much more exciting, this power broking, than attending to Prime Minister's questions, persuading the poor to go back to work, or deciding our position on the single currency.

But lest it be thought Mr Blair is displaying undue favouritism to Mr Murdoch, actually he may not be. His liking for corporate deal making is not tycoon specific. He seems to like all tycoons. If it's big business which runs the world these days, not governments, Mr Blair is determined to have his say. He also, by all accounts, encouraged Sir Richard Sykes to seek a merger with SmithKline Beecham after Jan Leschly announced an alternative tie up with American Home Products. Then there was his famous agreement with BT ahead of the election, under which BT was to wire up schools to the superhighway in return for early release from the ban on running broadcast TV over the telephone network.

Mr Blair talks constantly about the need for "partnership" between government and business and he's put prominent industrialists in charge of a number of key government reviews. Why, he's even appointed one of them - Lord Simcoo - a gov-

ernment minister. There may not be anything wrong as such with all this, but Mr Blair should not be surprised if it lays him open to charges of cronyism.

The function of government is to set a broad framework of public policy for all business to operate in on equal terms, not to favour one sectional commercial interest over others. For governments or prime ministers to cosy up to particular businessmen in the hope they might support their political or economic aims is wrong per se, as well as being potentially corrupt.

Let's be charitable about this and put Mr Blair's love of the boardroom down more to naivety and inexperience than anything more sinister. Even so, the fondness he displays for the aims and ambitions of big business is worryingly wrong headed. Mr Blair would probably deny he has bought the national champion arguments so much beloved of our consolidating capitalists of industry, but he certainly displays all the characteristic body language.

In today's global market place, the national champion case is a beguiling and seductive one. No doubt about that. Even this column has on occasions been persuaded of its merits. But in truth there's no correlation between size and efficiency in business, or between size and innovation. Rather the reverse. Our best hope of national prosperity lies out in a small number of giant national champions, out in hegemony, but in variety, in a vibrant free enterprise economy vigorously defended through public policy against monopolistic abuse and commercial

favouritism. Nobody is suggesting that what we are seeing in New Labour is the sort of fully fledged crony capitalism that came to epitomise the now discredited economies of the Far East, but there are enough warning signs here to be cause for genuine concern.

Conversion and executive pay

THE REAL reason for the building society conversions of the last year has emerged shamelessly from the closet ever faster than this column could have predicted. It never had anything to do with access to capital, the argument peddled by building society chiefs at the time. As it turns out, the building societies already have more capital than they know profitably what to do with. Unable to spend it to advantage, they are being forced to give it away by the bucket load.

Nor did it have anything to do with the more efficient, accountable and profit-orientated culture shareholder status is meant to bring about. Despite these supposed advantages, the converts are being persistently outclassed by the remaining mutuals with more competitive savings and mortgage rates. The mutuals are able to do this for the simple reason that they don't pay a dividend, and are winning market share from the converts with growing success.

No, the real reason is our old friend executive pay. Half the accounts last week revealed that Mike Blackburn, chief ex-

ecutive, doubled his annual pay to £824,000 in the leap from mutual to publicly listed status. That sum included a £300,000 "bonus" for conversion. Plucky little Northern Rock is following in the slip stream. The chief executive, Leo Finn, sees his salary rocket from £260,000 to £430,000. The justification given by Northern's remuneration committee is "to ensure that directors' basic salaries were paid at around the mid point between the median and upper quartiles within an appropriate comparator group of financial institutions".

No wonder so many of building society chiefs opted for conversion. Quite an incentive, that.

A fine old mess at Newcastle United

NEWCASTLE United are not having much luck on the pitch this season. But last night the supporters of good corporate governance were savouring a resounding victory at St James' Park after the departure of Douglas Hall, the aptly titled vice-chairman of the football club, and its chairman Freddie Shepherd.

That was how it was being presented, anyway. The trouble is that to reality it wasn't really this at all. The scoring partnership of Shepherd and Hall has been broken up not because of their poor stewardship of the quoted company, of which they are also both directors, but because of unguarded and offensive remarks made and recorded in a Spanish brothel.

It will probably suit the record books to show that the two men quit after running up against the defensive back line of Sir Terence Harrison, Dennis Cassidy and John Mayo. But the truth is there was a deafening silence from the independent non-execs for more than a week after the allegations first appeared in the News of the World.

Shareholder pressure only resulted in the departure of the two men in so far as most of the minority shareholders are also supporters. The better parallel is with the fate that befell Gerald Ratner after his ill-judged comments about the quality of his goods at the Institute of Directors. Those remarks ultimately cost Mr Ratner his job and his company.

Ultimately, the same may happen to the Hall dynasty. But in the meantime it remains in control. The patriarch, Sir John, comes out of retirement as caretaker chairman of the football club. Meanwhile Douglas may have quit with his tail between his legs but his holding company, Cameron Hall Developments, continues to hold 57 per cent of the shares and the right to nominate a director to the board. Likewise Shepherd Offshore, which controls a further 8 per cent of the shares.

While the two men seemed intent on staying put the shares rose by 10p. The talk now is of CHD selling down to below 50 per cent. Long term that may help the shares. But short term the overhang may further depress the price, leaving the average shareholder/supplier feeling as ripped off as if he had bought one of the Magpies' replica shirts. All very unsatisfactory.

£520m claim against BCCI auditors fails

By Les Paterson

THE HIGH COURT has struck out a \$866m (£520m) claim against Ernst & Young, the accountancy firm which acted as joint auditor to the collapsed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) until 1987.

However, Deloitte & Touche, liquidator to BCCI, said it would seek to overturn the judgment in the Court of Appeal. Deloitte & Touche is pursuing Ernst & Young, a predecessor of Ernst & Young, for a total of \$3.5bn - including the \$866m struck out yes-

terday - and has made allegations of negligence, breach of contract and breach of duty.

In his judgment, Mr Justice Laddie stated that, had the liquidator's submissions been accepted, "they would represent a radical extension of the liabilities shouldered by an auditor".

Nick Land, a senior partner of Ernst & Young, said he was "not surprised" that the claim had been found unsustainable.

Christopher Morris, a partner of Deloitte & Touche said: "The result is disappointing, but we shall be taking the matter to the Court of Appeal and hope to have the order reversed, as we did on a previous occasion".

Ionica seeks refinancing

By Michael Harrison

IONICA, the wireless telephone operator, is attempting to ease its financial troubles by replacing a £300m loan facility with a mixture of third-party finance, high-yield debt and fresh equity.

The company's shares have collapsed since its stock market flotation last July and it will not be able to draw on the credit facility because it is in breach of its banking covenants.

Instead of revising the terms of the facility with its financial backers, Banque Paribas, SBC Warburg, Société Générale and Nortel, Ionica is likely to seek

other forms of funding to complete the roll-out of its fixed radio access network.

The build-out of the network will cost £1.5bn and is not now expected to be complete until 2004 - four years later than the timescale set down in Ionica's licence.

Ionica has £100m in cash available to continue installing base stations but it will need new financing by the latter part of this year. Details of the new financing plans are due to appear in the summer as part of a strategic overhaul of the group launched by its new chief executive Michael Biden.

So far, Ionica has rolled out 10 per cent of the network and

has installed 250 base stations in three regions - East Anglia, the Midlands and Yorkshire. The company, which had 35,000 customers at the end of the third quarter, is aiming for 2 million subscribers and is concentrating its efforts on those areas where it has launched a service.

Mr Biden said he believed Ionica could attract 500,000 customers in the three areas where it is operating and said a new software upgrade, which will double its capacity, was on schedule to be installed from this May.

He was speaking as Ionica pledged that it would match the latest series of price cuts by BT,

which is reducing the cost of night time weekday local calls by 10 per cent next month.

Ionica shocked the market last autumn by disclosing that the software upgrade had been delayed and its roll-out programme was behind schedule. Since then the shares have plunged to 70p from their flotation price of 390p, wiping £525m from Ionica's value.

Mr Biden said Ionica was also looking at the possibility of piggy-backing on base stations already installed in other parts of the country by other operators and offering space on its own base stations to third parties.

World Bank questions the wisdom of free capital flows in emerging markets

By Diana Coyle
Economics Editor

THE WORLD BANK called yesterday for a debate on the need for capital controls on investment in developing countries in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis.

The Bank admitted that capital liberalisation could carry risks for emerging markets.

Fred Kilby, the author of the World Bank's annual report on financial flows in the developing world, said: "There may be a case for looking at whether it is feasible or desirable to place some constraints on short-term capital flows."

The comments will guarantee a reassessment of the IMF's drive for further liberalisation of global capital markets is high on the agenda next month, when the two institutions hold their half-yearly meeting in Washington.

Yesterday's report highlighted the control introduced by Chile in 1991 and Colombia in 1993. These in effect tax loans of short maturities. Studies suggest they have tilted borrowing towards long-term loans.

Private capital flows in developing countries reached a new record last year of \$256bn (£155bn). The rich OECD members cut their aid budgets from \$59bn in 1996 to \$55bn in 1997 or 0.25 per cent of GDP.

STUDENT CHOICES

Thursday 2 April 1998
Business Design Centre, London N1

INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

One day national conference to consider up to date research into the impact of student fees and loans on student choices in higher and further education. A conference for university vice-chancellors and senior management, college principals and chief executives, admissions deans, entrance administrators, student services providers, college marketing officers and head teachers to examine options for action in response to the new funding structure.

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

- Baroness Blackstone, Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment
- Rosie Boycott, Editor, The Independent and The Independent on Sunday
- Dr John Brennan, Director of FE Development, Association of Colleges
- Dr Geoffrey Copland, Vice-Chancellor, University of Westminster
- Bill Eyres, Corporate Affairs Manager, Co-operative Bank
- Tony Higgins, Chief Executive, UCAS
- Diana Warwick, Chief Executive, Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
- Carole Whitty, Headteacher, Carisbrooke High School
- Chris Yapp, Managing Consultant, ICL

CONFERENCE FEES,

Full Rate
Reduced Rate
Supported Rate

Total: £293.75
Total: £217.37
Total: £141.00

For more information, please contact

Neil Stewart Associates

11 Dartmouth Street
London SW1H 9BL

tel 0171-222 1280
fax 0171-222 1278

Deal Time

Our Best Offers Yet!

These cuts out the middleman to offer you new higher specification Family PC models with even lower prices and including a FREE printer for a limited period. There has never been a better time to buy a PC. Visit your local Time showroom or call direct and take advantage of the UK's best PC deals.

Best buy 266-2 model shown with Intel Pentium® II

233M Family PC™
• 233MHz Intel Pentium® processor with MMX™ technology
• 32MB RAM
• 4.3Gb hard disk
• 56k modem
• 4MB ATI 3D Graphics
• 52x MAX CD-ROM
• 3D waveable sound
• 14" SVGA colour screen (15" optional) 256 + VAT = £849.00
• SPS25 stereo speaker system
• Over 5000 software* bundle
• Daily Championship game
• 90 minute VHS video trainer
• Year 2000 compliant
• ATX mid tower with all standard features
• 14 Day money back guarantee (excluding carriage)
• FREE Epson 300 colour printer
Product codes: 19 428 17 428

£849
£997.58

233M-2 Family PC™
Best Buy model only (233 + VAT = £91.26) As 233M above but with: Faster 64MB RAM, 52x MAX CD-ROM, 4MB ATI 3D Graphics, 56k modem, 14" SVGA colour screen, 3D waveable sound, SPS25 stereo speaker system, Over 5000 software* bundle, Daily Championship game, 90 minute VHS video trainer, Year 2000 compliant, ATX mid tower with all standard features, 14 Day money back guarantee (excluding carriage), FREE Epson 300 colour printer. Product codes: 19 428 17 428

FREE PRINTER
The Fastest Systems
All systems include fast processors, fast RAM and fast hard disks. 52x MAX CD-ROM drives and 56k modems. All systems include a FREE printer. All systems include a FREE printer.

266-2 Family PC™
As 233M but with:
• 266MHz Intel Pentium® II processor
• 64MB RAM
• 8.4Gb hard disk
• 4MB ATI AGP 3D graphics
• 15" SVGA colour screen (17" optional) £149 + VAT = £175.00 extra
• Includes 56k modem, 32x CD and other items as 233M
• Includes FREE Epson 300 colour printer
Product codes: 19 428 17 428

£1099
£1291.33

266M-2 TV Family PC™
High performance model only (233 + VAT = £116.26) As 266-2 above but with: Faster 64MB RAM, 52x MAX CD-ROM, 4MB ATI AGP 3D Graphics, 56k modem, 14" SVGA colour screen, 3D waveable sound, SPS25 stereo speaker system, Over 5000 software* bundle, Daily Championship game, 90 minute VHS video trainer, Year 2000 compliant, ATX mid tower with all standard features, 14 Day money back guarantee (excluding carriage), FREE Epson 300 colour printer. Product codes: 19 428 17 428

266M-2 TVX Family PC™
As 266M-2 TV model above but with: Faster 64MB RAM, 52x MAX CD-ROM, 4MB ATI AGP 3D Graphics, 56k modem, 14" SVGA colour screen, 3D waveable sound, SPS25 stereo speaker system, Over 5000 software* bundle, Daily Championship game, 90 minute VHS video trainer, Year 2000 compliant, ATX mid tower with all standard features, 14 Day money back guarantee (excluding carriage), FREE Epson 300 colour printer. Product codes: 19 428 17 428

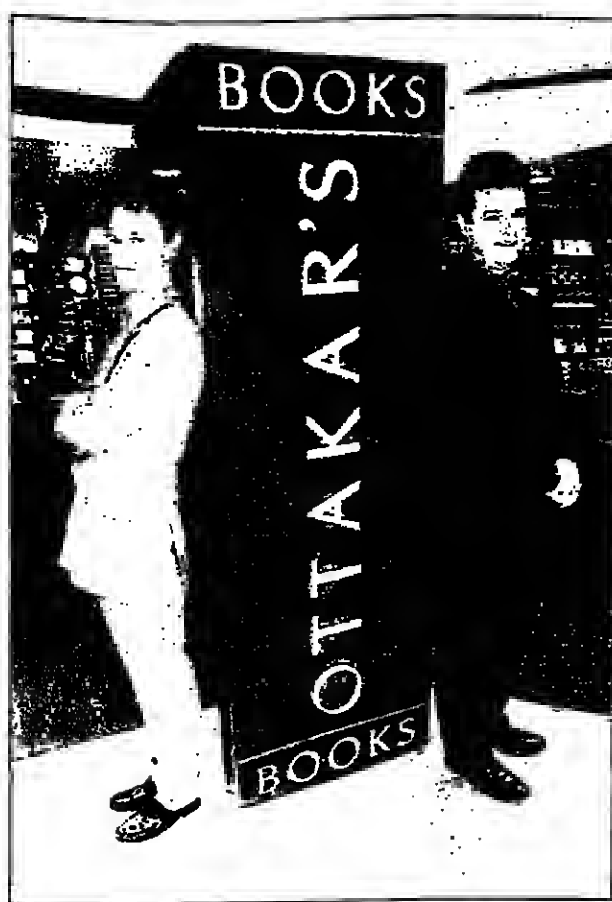
42 UK Showrooms
List of showrooms across the UK.

Other Time Showrooms
List of other Time showrooms.

Buy Now... Pay Sept 1998
INTEREST FREE CREDIT
0% APR
Finance can be available over longer periods of 7.5 years at APR 12.9%. 10% deposit £112.98 (based on £1000) to pay for 6 months and then 14 monthly payments of £128.98. Total price £1479.98. Finance is subject to credit checks. Written offers are available on request.

Freephone Time Now!
0800 771107
Gates Lanes Open: Monday - Friday 9.30am-7.00pm, Saturday 9.30am-5.00pm.
All offers end April 4th

TIME COMPUTER SYSTEMS



Book profits: James Heneage, Ottakar's managing director (left), and Neil Lloyd, finance director

Ottakar's pushes ahead with float after talks with US book giant

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

OTTAKAR'S, the book retailer, yesterday confirmed it had held "informal discussions" with its American rival Barnes & Noble "about mutual areas of interest" but said it remained fully committed to its stock market flotation. The company is coming to the market next month via a placing with institutions that will raise £18m and value the 47-strong chain at £30m.

James Heneage, the managing director, said: "There was no approach for the business,

nor will there be. We will remain independent and we will float."

It is thought that they centred on a possible joint venture in certain aspects of the business. This could be Ottakar's using Barnes & Noble's expertise in developing larger stores.

Mr Heneage admitted that there was nothing to stop Barnes & Noble buying a stake in the business after its float.

Mr Heneage was speaking as Ottakar's published its pathfinder prospectus, which showed pre-tax profits last year rose 77 per cent to £2m. Sales grew 63 per cent to £38m.

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY ANDREW YATES

P&O profits steam ahead

LORD STERLING, P&O's pugnacious chairman, has had to navigate choppy waters over the last three years. Some of the group's shareholders called for his head as dividend payouts remained at a standstill and the City moaned about the company's perceived lack of direction.

But his lordship really did have something to smile about yesterday. He unveiled a better-than-expected set of 1997 profit figures and a positive outlook for the future. Pre-tax profits rose 30 per cent to £433.9m in the year to 31 December 1997 while headline profits before re-organisation costs were up 25 per cent to £401.2m. There was no immediate dividend hike but there were strong hints this would happen next time.

There were strong contributions from the cruise, property and ferry divisions and P&O has embarked on a series of joint ventures to counter difficult markets. Partnerships with Steena and Shougang have helped share up profits for ferries and bulk shipping respectively. The only disappointments were the P&O Nedlloyd joint container shipping venture and the Trans European trucking arm.

P&O is slimmer, trimmer and working hard to come up to new standards of return on capital employed (Roce), now set at 15 per cent. Over two years the group overall has raised its Roce from 11.1 to 12.9 per cent.

The P&O Nedlloyd venture languished at 2 per cent while Trans European was also dismal. But Lord Sterling is confident his expected predecessor, Tim Harris, can rescue the former while the latter is threatened with a sell-off if it fails to improve.

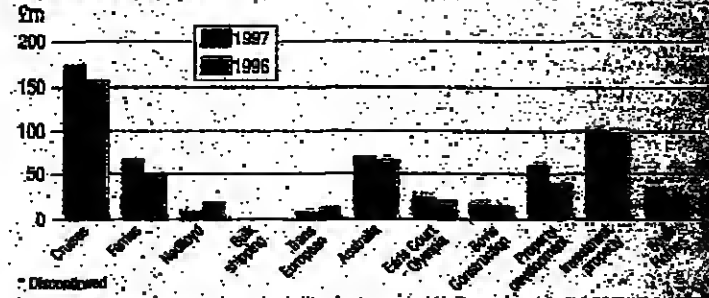
P&O shares, which have outperformed the market by 9 per cent over the last three months, rose another 33p to 889p. Analysts expect 1998 profits to reach £475m, putting P&O on a forward multiple of 16.8. It is not late to climb aboard.

P&O: At a glance

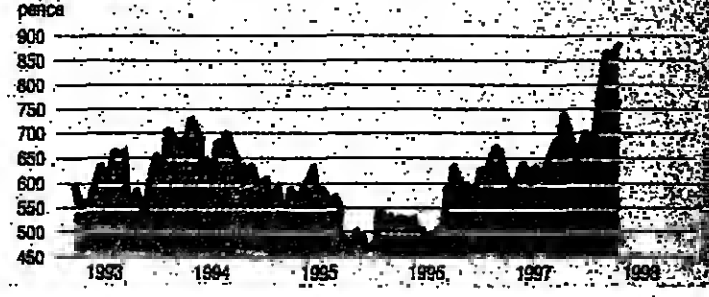
Market value: £5.5bn, share price 889p (+33p)

Five-year record	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Turnover (£bn)	5.5	5.9	6.6	7.1	5.9
Pre-tax profits (£m)	520.6	348.5	320.4	332.8	433.9
Earnings per share (p)	68.0	38.5	37.8	40.1	53.1
Dividends per share (p)	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5

Operating profit



Share price



Iceland makes a cool comeback

IF THERE was an Oscar for unlikely retail comeback of the year then Malcolm Walker's Iceland would surely win it. This time last year the company announced a buy-back of a third of its shares to boost its flagging share price after its first dip in profits for 26 years. By July the

shares had dipped to a five year low of 77p and by September the board had controversially re-negotiated their share option prices (downwards obviously).

And now look what's happened. Iceland surprised everyone yesterday with sales sharply boosted by the introduction of home delivery. The shares followed suit rising 10 per cent to 197.5p as analysts rushed to upgrade.

Same-store sales are up by a thumping 16 per cent in current trading though this is against a very weak com-

parison the previous year. It is expecting the figure to drop to a still respectable mid-single figure over the year.

All this should not detract from Mr Walker's entrepreneurial achievement. If there is a criticism now it is that the company is trying to do too much. Gearing is high but should fall to less than 70 per cent in two years. Assuming current year profits of £60m the shares trade on a meaty forward p/e of less than 10. A 50 per cent discount to the market looks cheap.

Nycomed deals prove a success

NYCOMED Amersham has had a hectic year, completing not one but two mergers to create a real force in the worldwide healthcare market. Both deals have been a real success for shareholders. Underlying earnings per share, perhaps the best way to measure the growth in the business, jumped 41 per cent to 90.1p. The share price has reflected this great performance, rising strongly since last Autumn.

The new group has only just started to reap the benefit of cost savings, which should rise to £70m by the turn of the century. But the group will have to start producing strong organic growth to justify its rating. Its X-ray business will continue to suffer this year from a price war in the US.

A slimmed down pharmaceutical business is showing better returns following a sharp cut in the research and development budget. The real driver to growth, however, will be its life sciences business, which specialises in developing ways to speed up the development of new drugs.

The shares slipped 59p to 227.1p yesterday on US trading and currency fears. ABN Amro Hoare Govett forecasts current year profits of £227m, putting the shares on a prospective p/e of 22. Nycomed Amersham still looks like a solid hold with good long term prospects.

Flextech plans holiday channel

By Peter Thal Larsen

FLEXTECH, the television programming group, yesterday unveiled plans to launch an interactive travel television channel which will allow viewers to order holidays while watching programmes about their destinations.

Brett Harman, managing director, said the channel was likely to be one of many based around home shopping. He said Flextech had chosen travel because many viewers already use Teletext when planning their holidays.

The announcement was made as Flextech announced a net profit, before exceptional costs, of £1.9m for 1997, compared to a £15.6m loss the previous year. The profits were struck before exceptional costs of £7m related to the start-up costs of UKTV, Flextech's joint venture with the BBC, and the costs of relaunching Flextech's own channels.

The company said it was planning to launch another two UKTV channels. The first, called UKFM, will be a music channel similar to MTV. The second will be a sports entertainment channel carrying quizzes and gameshows.

Flextech said it was still in negotiations with BSkyB, the satellite operator, about a deal which would offer all Flextech's channels to subscribers to BSkyB's digital service, which launches in June. The two companies are understood to have reached an agreement on price. Flextech shares closed up 29p at 535p.

Savoy's sparkle set to raise asking price

By Andrew Yates

THE SAVOY HOTEL group, the subject of a furious bidding war, yesterday burst back into the black, announcing pre-tax profits of £22.2m in 1997 compared to a loss of £24.3m in the previous year.

The figures smashed analysts' forecasts and could raise the asking price of the group, which owns The Connaught, Claridge's and The Berkeley, to more than £550m.

The Savoy's resurgence also ensures that Ramon Pajares, managing director, and his management team, will be kept on by any new owners if the group is sold.

American hotel groups and financial buyers are circling. Blackstone, the US bank, has already tabled an indicative bid of £520m. However analysts believe that the Savoy's strong results should attract buyers from around the world keen to get hold of some of the most

prized properties in the industry. The interest could push the price much higher.

No formal offer has yet been put to shareholders and none of the potential suitors have started due diligence. The group is unlikely to select a final buyer for some time. A sale is being held up by a wrangle between the Wontner family and Granada, the group's largest shareholders, over the division of the spoils. Bickering within the Wontner family may also scupper a deal. Doubts about a sale going ahead sent Savoy's shares down 87.5p to 1800p yesterday.

Mr Pajares said he was confident he could continue to improve the performance of the hotels whoever ended up controlling them and was happy to work for any owner.

He is keen to take the Savoy name abroad. "We have no plans to do that at the moment but speaking on a personal level the brand name is excellent and it would be a very good

chance to ... look at opportunities overseas," he said.

Savoy's operating profits jumped 54 per cent to £24.2m, reflecting the fruits of a £72m refurbishment program at its flagship hotels over the last few years.

Higher occupancy and room rates helped operating margins improve to 23.8 from 17.7 per cent. Operating profits at The Berkeley grew 61 per cent thanks to the opening of an exclusive health club on the site in conjunction with Christian Dior. A strong marketing drive in the US and Europe to attract new visitors meant the group was able to shrug off the potentially damaging effect of the strong pound and the economic turmoil in the Far East. The group plans to spend another £9m sprucing up the hotels this year.

Over the last three years its pre-tax profits have grown 460 per cent and dividends have trebled.

Profits leap at troubled Newcastle

By Andrew Yates

NEWCASTLE United, the Premier League football club rocked by a row over insulting remarks by two executives, yesterday tried to draw a line under the episode as it unveiled a strong rise in interim profits.

Operating profits rose 56 per cent to £10.3m for the six months to January, thanks to a strong rise in television revenues. Participation in the European Champions league contributed £5.5m, compared to the £3.6m from the UEFA Cup the previous season. However sales of replica kits and merchandise were disappointing.

Newcastle wants to expand its retail operation from the North-East, where it has reached saturation. It wants to expand its mail order operation and is considering setting up new stand-alone retail outlets.

Freddie Fletcher, group chief executive, said the controversy surrounding Freddie Shepherd and Douglas Hall had damaged sales. Neither director will receive any pay-off following their resignation.

Outlook, page 23

Skilled workforce 'is no economic panacea'

By Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

IMPROVING the skills of the workforce might be at the top of the Government's jobs agenda, but it is no panacea for improving Britain's economic performance. That will also depend on companies aiming to sell higher quality goods and services, according to a new report from the Employment Policy Institute.

Many British businesses opt for what the authors identify as the "Gerald Ratner strategy" of competing on the basis of low price and low quality. When the former head of the bargain jewellery chain described its products as "crap", he might have been foolish but he was honest, according to Ewart Keep of Warwick Business School and Ken Mayhew of Pembroke College, Oxford.

Their research suggests that many British companies opt for this strategy rather than developing high-quality products that require skilled labour. This can make sense for businesses that do not have a wealthy customer base or do

not have the internal organisation to move upmarket.

Given this pattern, improved workforce skills will not by itself guarantee a more competitive UK economy.

Mr Keep said: "For many British companies, competitiveness lies not in upskilling workers to make quality products but through price. Providing companies with more highly skilled workers can only increase levels of dissatisfaction when those workers are employed in poor quality, low-paid jobs."

The paper, "Was Ratner Right?" recommends a dual policy of encouraging businesses to opt for the high-value strategy at the same time as improving standards of education and training.

Companies would also have to switch to patterns of work organisation that allowed employees to use their skills, and improve employee relations to improve trust and motivation.

It concludes that this "poses a major challenge to policymakers for whom upskilling has for too long been a convenient 'magic bullet' solution".

With PointsCard our reward scheme you can

Take a free weekend break



Enjoy free weekend accommodation with PointsCard our reward scheme for hotel guests. Collect points every time you stay at a Posthouse and you could soon be relaxing in any of over 80 hotels throughout the UK and Ireland, including city centre, countryside and coastal locations. To start enjoying all the benefits of PointsCard, registration forms are available at any Posthouse hotel or call us on 01276 675 005.

FORTE
Posthouse
first for all the right reasons

For full details or to book call free **0800 40 40 40** or contact your local travel agent

Quote Reason 4
www.forte-hotels.com

سكرا من الامل

Flextech
plans
holiday
channel

HK group pockets £176m from Somerfield merger

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

THOSE chaps at Dairy Farm must be feeling pretty pleased with themselves. At the beginning of the year, the Hong Kong based food retailing group, part of the Jardine Matheson empire, was sitting on a large stake in supermarket group Kwik Save which was rapidly diminishing in value.

Dairy Farm wanted out, but wanted a better price for its shares than the market was prepared to pay.

Their response was to broker a merger with Somerfield, the rival supermarket group, in February. The deal, which lifted shares in both companies, got the thumbs up from the regulators earlier last week and was declared unconditional last Friday.

The merger left Dairy Farm with an 11 per cent holding in the new, enlarged Somerfield. But not for long. Yesterday, the Hong Kong group, acting through SBC Warburg, placed all its shares

with institutional investors, at a price around 333p.

Analysts said the main interest was likely to have come from UK value investors as well as UK tracker funds, which have to have a holding in Somerfield now that it is part of the FTSE 350 index.

The result is that everybody is happy. Dairy Farm pockets a cool £176m for its trouble, while investors no longer worry about an overhang of stock in the market. Indeed, Somerfield shares put on 7.5p to 345.5p yesterday - almost £1 higher than they were when the merger was announced.

The Somerfield activity was one of the few bits of hard news on a trading day which was otherwise soggy with old rumours.

Traders attempted to dress up the old story of consolidation in the defence industry. Rather than wheel out the old one about a merger between British Aerospace and

GEC, both stocks were instead being pushed as potential predators in the US.

The argument runs something like this: The US government's decision to block the merger between aerospace groups Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman means both will be looking for partners elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the European defence industry is expected to present a proposal for consolidation to the French, German and British governments by the end of the month. Even though every indication is that the report will be a damp squib, some continue to hold out hopes for a positive statement.

GEC finished the day at 469p, up 21p, while British Aerospace put on 52p to close at 2015p.

Ladbroke was the best-performing stock in the Footsie, rising 22p - or 6.5 per cent - to close at 358p on renewed speculation that the group is re-

viving its merger plans with the Hilton hotel group. Analysts think Tuesday's collapse of Hilton's merger with US group Circus makes a deal with Ladbroke more likely.

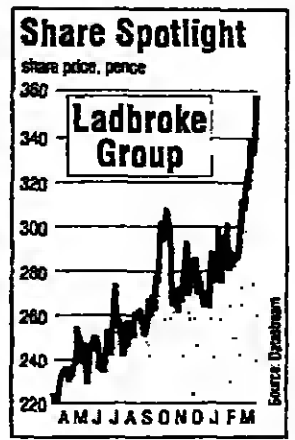
Despite all this rumour, the Footsie hardly responded, making little progress towards the 6,000 mark until a strong opening on Wall Street - a response to the previous

day's fall - lifted the index to 5983.7, up 36.7, at the close. Among the blue chips, drinks groups Allied Domecq and Diageo moved ahead after ABN Amro rated both as a buy.

The broker reckons that Allied Domecq, up 1p at 587p, is good value even if it fails to find a merger partner for its drinks businesses. Meanwhile, the argument that the market has yet to recognise the full merger benefits residing in Diageo lifted the shares 12.5p to 725p.

Meadowdale, Bass put on 41p to 1145p. Bristol Hotel, in which the hotels group has a 32 per cent stake, announced a merger with rival US outfit FelCor Suite Hotels. The deal values Bass' stake at \$390m.

British Telecom gave up some of its recent gains after unveiling its latest price cuts. An SBC Warburg downgrade also helped knock the shares down 25p to 656p.



TAKING STOCK

WATCH out for action at Albemarle & Bond, the AIM-listed pawnbroker. Ecorp International, a Texas-based pawnbroking outfit, has taken a 29.99 per cent stake. Albemarle's management says it has been aware of the company, and is trying to find out what its intentions are. Ecorp bought 2.1 of its shares from long-term shareholder Central Europe Corporation, and is expected to make a statement in the next few weeks. The shares traded up 7p to 51.5p.

THERE are still devoted football fans around. A supporter of Manchester City, the Nationwide League relegation candidates, was fined with 850,000 shares in the club at 88p a share. The proceeds of £748,000 are to help fund player purchases. The supporter remained anonymous, although the club stressed he is "unconnected" to any board member or major shareholder. The Oxford shares dropped 10p to 53p.

Profit-taking also hit Orange, down 2p at 410p, and Vodafone, 14p lighter at 82p. Blackbird Toys, fending off a hostile 101p bid from Ron Brierley's Guinness Peat Group, enjoyed a 6p rise to 113.5p after revealing it had received other offers which could lead to a counter-bid for the Polly Pocket to Plasticine group. GPG was unchanged at 34p.

Software group Miys, which just missed out on a place in the Footsie earlier this month, steamed through the £30 mark for the first time after giving analysts a positive update. The shares were up 100p to exactly 3000.

Other midcap favourites were engineering group Glynwed, which stormed up 33p to 294p after unveiling a bullish set of results.

The same factors helped television group Flextech, 29p up at 535p, and construction group Taylor Woodrow, 8p better at 253p.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months' declared gross dividend as a percentage of the share price. The price-earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including extraordinary gains. Other details: Ex-Right: A £1 dividend; Ex-Left: A £1 dividend; P: P/E ratio; Y: Yield; Div: Dividend; Div Yr: Dividend Year.

The Independent Teleshare - Tel: 0891 - 201 200

You will hear the current FTSE 100 index followed by a Stock Market Summary Report.

You can interpret at any time to hear a Real-Time Share Price by dialling 1 plus a 4-digit code from 001-725-0288 (during business hours).

To get a Membership Number to see your Portfolio facility, please call the Help Desk at 0171-725-0288.

For help with the service, including the Portfolio facility, call the Help Desk at 0171-725-0288.

175 p.p. London ECA 4p.

Seagull: 102.9m trades 76.045

Market Leaders: Top 20 volumes

at 5.00pm

FTSE 100 Index hour by hour

15.00 5982.5 15.30 5987.5 15.45 5992.5 16.00 5997.5

16.15 6002.5 16.30 6007.5 16.45 6012.5 17.00 6017.5

17.15 6022.5 17.30 6027.5 17.45 6032.5 18.00 6037.5

18.15 6042.5 18.30 6047.5 18.45 6052.5 19.00 6057.5

19.15 6062.5 19.30 6067.5 19.45 6072.5 20.00 6077.5

20.15 6082.5 20.30 6087.5 20.45 6092.5 21.00 6097.5

21.15 6102.5 21.30 6107.5 21.45 6112.5 22.00 6117.5

22.15 6122.5 22.30 6127.5 22.45 6132.5 23.00 6137.5

23.15 6142.5 23.30 6147.5 23.45 6152.5 24.00 6157.5

24.15 6162.5 24.30 6167.5 24.45 6172.5 25.00 6177.5

25.15 6182.5 25.30 6187.5 25.45 6192.5 26.00 6197.5

26.15 6202.5 26.30 6207.5 26.45 6212.5 27.00 6217.5

27.15 6222.5 27.30 6227.5 27.45 6232.5 28.00 6237.5

28.15 6242.5 28.30 6247.5 28.45 6252.5 29.00 6257.5

29.15 6262.5 29.30 6267.5 29.45 6272.5 30.00 6277.5

30.15 6282.5 30.30 6287.5 30.45 6292.5 31.00 6297.5

31.15 6302.5 31.30 6307.5 31.45 6312.5 32.00 6317.5

32.15 6322.5 32.30 6327.5 32.45 6332.5 33.00 6337.5

33.15 6342.5 33.30 6347.5 33.45 6352.5 34.00 6357.5

34.15 6362.5 34.30 6367.5 34.45 6372.5 35.00 6377.5

35.15 6382.5 35.30 6387.5 35.45 6392.5 36.00 6397.5

36.15 6402.5 36.30 6407.5 36.45 6412.5 37.00 6417.5

37.15 6422.5 37.30 6427.5 37.45 6432.5 38.00 6437.5

38.15 6442.5 38.30 6447.5 38.45 6452.5 39.00 6457.5

39.15 6462.5 39.30 6467.5 39.45 6472.5 40.00 6477.5

40.15 6482.5 40.30 6487.5 40.45 6492.5 41.00 6497.5

41.15 6502.5 41.30 6507.5 41.45 6512.5 42.00 6517.5

42.15 6522.5 42.30 6527.5 42.45 6532.5 43.00 6537.5

43.15 6542.5 43.30 6547.5 43.45 6552.5 44.00 6557.5

44.15 6562.5 44.30 6567.5 44.45 6572.5 45.00 6577.5

45.15 6582.5 45.30 6587.5 45.45 6592.5 46.00 6597.5

46.15 6602.5 46.30 6607.5 46.45 6612.5 47.00 6617.5

47.15 6622.5 47.30 6627.5 47.45 6632.5 48.00 6637.5

48.15 6642.5 48.30 6647.5 48.45 6652.5 49.00 6657.5

49.15 6662.5 49.30 6667.5 49.45 6672.5 50.00 6677.5

50.15 6682.5 50.30 6687.5 50.45 6692.5 51.00 6697.5

51.15 6702.5 51.30 6707.5 51.45 6712.5 52.00 6717.5

52.15 6722.5 52.30 6727.5 52.45 6732.5 53.00 6737.5

53.15 6742.5 53.30 6747.5 53.45 6752.5 54.00 6757.5

54.15 6762.5 54.30 6767.5 54.45 6772.5 55.00 6777.5

55.15 6782.5 55.30 6787.5 55.45 6792.5 56.00 6797.5

56.15 6802.5 56.30 6807.5 56.45 6812.5 57.00 6817.5

57.15 6822.5 57.30 6827.5 57.45 6832.5 58.00 6837.5

58.15 6842.5 58.30 6847.5 58.45 6852.5 59.00 6857.5

59.15 6862.5 59.30 6867.5 59.45 6872.5 60.00 6877.5

60.15 6882.5 60.30 6887.5 60.45 6892.5 61.00 6897.5

61.15 6902.5 61.30 6907.5 61.45 6912.5 62.00 6917.5

62.15 6922.5 62.30 6927.5 62.45 6932.5 63.00 6937.5

63.15 6942.5 63.30 6947.5 63.45 6952.5 64.00 6957.5

64.15 6962.5 64.30 6967.5 64.45 6972.5 65.00 6977.5

65.15 6982.5 65.30 6987.5 65.45 6992.5 66.00 6997.5

66.15 7002.5 66.30 7007.5 66.45 7012.5 67.00 7017.5

67.15 7022.5 67.30 7027.5 67.45 7032.5 68.00 7037.5

68.15 7042.5 68.30 7047.5 68.45 7052.5 69.00 7057.5

69.15 7062.5 69.30 7067.5 69.45 7072.5 70.00 7077.5

THE CHELSEA VILLAGE HOTEL

The Heart of Business

Business centre Underground parking

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

160 en-suite bedrooms hotel 5 Restaurants and Bars

Tel: 0171 565 1400

cle set
ng price

orkforce
omic pan

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Sterling	Spot	1 month	3 month	Dollar	Spot	1 month	3 month	D-Mark	Spot
UK	10000				0.5697	0.6876	0.6876	0.6876	0.3955	
Australia	24876	24844	24886		1.4555	1.4555	1.4555	1.4555	0.7370	
Austria	21556	21516	21516		2.2655	2.2655	2.2655	2.2655	0.7030	
Belgium	83120	83004	82923		37.78	37.59	37.59	37.59	0.7764	
Canada	2633	2727	2727		1.668	1.668	1.668	1.668	0.7155	
Denmark	1618	1614	1614		10.657	10.617	10.617	10.617	0.3053	
Finland	2437	2439	2439		5.5475	5.5375	5.5375	5.5375	0.6858	
France	92977	92999	92999		6.594	6.594	6.594	6.594	0.3337	
Germany	1024	1023	1023		12.77	12.84	12.84	12.84	0.7000	
Greece	10352	10357	10357		30.08	30.08	30.08	30.08	1.4538	
Italy	53506	53505	53505		7.763	7.763	7.763	7.763	0.7426	
Hong Kong	1021	1021	1021		13.73	13.73	13.73	13.73	0.7512	
India	2032	2032	2032		16.02	16.02	16.02	16.02	0.7125	
Japan	30775	30765	30765		25.83	25.83	25.83	25.83	0.4350	
Malaysia	2432	2432	2432		3.678	3.678	3.678	3.678	0.4772	
Mexico	14308				2.052	2.052	2.052	2.052	1.4219	
Netherlands	14328	14407	14407		17.75	17.75	17.75	17.75	0.3379	
New Zealand	25716	25711	25711		8.223	8.223	8.223	8.223	0.4042	
Norway	12682	12682	12682		10.63	10.63	10.63	10.63	0.4243	
Portugal	3157	3157	3157		16.75	16.75	16.75	16.75	0.3447	
Saudi Arabia	62863	62867	62867		37.90	37.92	37.92	37.92	0.7897	
South Africa	27008	26997	26997		16.15	16.15	16.15	16.15	0.2221	
Spain	16330	16330	16330		14.765	14.765	14.765	14.765	0.6950	
Sweden	25944	25943	25940		15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	0.4330	
Switzerland	12979	12943	12943		14.90	14.92	14.92	14.92	0.8359	
US	16780	24653	24605		10.000				0.5471	

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	16780	10000	Chile	68462	0.3850
Brazil	13670	10000	Costa Rica	62386	0.3850
Canada	82784	82784	Czech Rep.	32285	37225
China Rep.	84050	84050	France	10249	3440
Colombia	73144	44000	Germany	10249	3440
Czech Rep.	32285	37225	Hong Kong	10249	3440
Denmark	10249	3440	Italy	10249	3440
Dollar	10000	10000	Malaysia	10249	3440
France	10249	3440	Netherlands	10249	3440
Germany	10249	3440	Portugal	10249	3440
Greece	10249	3440	South Africa	10249	3440
Hong Kong	10249	3440	Spain	10249	3440
India	10249	3440	Sweden	10249	3440
Japan	10249	3440	Switzerland	10249	3440
Malaysia	10249	3440	US	10249	3440

Interest Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
UK	7.25%	Discount	US	8.50%	Discount
France	5.50%	Discount	Belgium	5.50%	Discount
Canada	5.50%	Discount	Sweden	5.50%	Discount
Italy	5.50%	Discount	Spain	5.50%	Discount
Germany	5.50%	Discount	Netherlands	5.50%	Discount
Denmark	5.50%	Discount	Switzerland	5.50%	Discount
Sweden	5.50%	Discount	US	5.50%	Discount
Switzerland	5.50%	Discount	US	5.50%	Discount

Bond Yields

Country	3 month	1 year	2 year	5 year	10 year
Australia	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Belgium	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Canada	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
ECU	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
France	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Germany	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Italy	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Japan	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Netherlands	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Sweden	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
Switzerland	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78
US	4.88	4.01	4.76	4.04	5.78

Money Market Rates

Instrument	Overnight	1 week	1 month	3 months	6 months	1 year
3-month T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
90-day T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
180-day T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
1-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
2-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
3-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
4-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
5-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
6-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
7-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
8-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
9-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00
10-year T-bill	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00	7.25	7.00

Life Insurance Futures

Contract	Settlement	High	Low	Est. Volume	Open Interest
Long Gilt	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
5-Y Gilt	Jun-96	102.95	102.85	10.22	233000
10-Y Gilt	Jun-96	102.95	102.85	10.22	233000
German Bund	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
Japan Govd Bd	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
5-Min Sterling	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
3-Mth Eurodollar	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
3-Mth Euroyen	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
3-Mth Eurodollar	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
3-Mth Euroyen	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
3-Mth ECU	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020
FTSE 100	Jun-96	106.25	106.34	10.03	409020

Life FTSE 100 Index Option

Series	Call	Put	Call	Put	Call	Put
5000	2.05	2.05	67	21	267	18
6000	1.80	1.80	20	208	137	300
7000	1.55	1.55	20	208	137	300
8000	1.30	1.30	20	208	137	300
9000	1.05	1.05	20	208	137	300

Commodity Indices

Index	Settlement	High	Low	%Chg	%Chg YTD
Index	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Agricultural	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Energy	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Metals	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Livestock	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Prec Metals	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20

Energy

Instrument	Settlement	High	Low	%Chg	%Chg YTD
Brent Crude (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
WTI Crude (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Heating Oil (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Natural Gas (\$/MMBtu)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20

Financial Metals

Instrument	Settlement	High	Low	%Chg	%Chg YTD
Gold (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Silver (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Palladium (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Platinum (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20

Precious Metals

Instrument	Settlement	High	Low	%Chg	%Chg YTD
Gold (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Silver (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Palladium (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Platinum (\$/oz)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20

Agricultural

Instrument	Settlement	High	Low	%Chg	%Chg YTD
Wheat (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Corn (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Soybeans (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20
Cotton (\$/bbl)	106.25	106.34	106.03	-0.22	-1.20

Top 100 Largest Insurance Funds

Fund	Assets	Assets	Assets	Assets	Assets
AIA Equity	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Bond	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Money	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Real Estate	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA International	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Global	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Europe	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Asia	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Pacific	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34
AIA Latin America	106.25	106.34	106.03	106.25	106.34

كتاب من الاصل

Interest rate rises cool housing market

By Kerry Benfield

LAST YEAR'S strong growth in the housing and construction sector is unlikely to be repeated in 1998 despite the recent jump in retail sales, according to industry analysts. The booming market had already begun what was being called a long-term slowdown in the face of increasing interest rates and a strong pound, they said.

"That bounce is pretty much over," Michael Foster of Credit Lyonnais Laing said yesterday of the most recent rise. "We are still going to be seeing UK demand rising, but there are problems on the pricing end."

Their comments came as two leading players in the market, Taylor Woodrow and Marley, revealed a strong performance in 1997 but hinted at slower growth this year.

Taylor Woodrow announced a 1997 pre-tax profit of £82.1m,

a 23 per cent rise, with housing profits up £8m, property making a gain of £1.7m and construction profits rising £5.2m.

Colin Parsons, the chief executive, expressed subdued enthusiasm for this year's market after the 1997 profit explosion. "Taylor Woodrow is looking at 1998 with some optimism. Market conditions appear generally positive for all our operations."

Taylor Woodrow believes the most recent rise in the UK housing market suggests that customer interest remains high across the country. But it expects the price rises in 1998 will be slow in comparison with 1997.

Taylor Woodrow's housing business, Taylorwood Homes, reported a 9 per cent rise in UK sales last year but expect that number to reach only 7 per cent in 1998. Profits will also not see last year's heights, and Mr Parsons said that "the major price rises of last year are behind us".

Taylorwood Homes is turning its housing development focus towards city centres. It is also part of the consortium that will develop the 1,400-home Greenwich Millennium Village.

Construction companies have already felt the crunch of the market slowdown. Tony Alexander, the chairman of Marley, the building materials group, said signs of a let-down came at the end of last year.

"New housing activity was stronger in the first half [of 1997], particularly in the South-east, but this improvement tailed off as the year progressed," he said. Marley said the strong pound cut £4m from operating profits.

Throughout the industry, housing and general construction contracts are expected to rise 3 per cent in 1998, according to Mr Foster, but intense rises on par with last year's numbers are not forecast.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

JOHN WILLCOCK



THESE are unsettling times if you are a eurobond salesman for Russia. Mikhail Zadornov, Russia's Minister of Finance, completed a roadshow last week across seven European cities to stump up interest in a DM1bn eurobond being issued by the country.

The sales tour took in Frankfurt on Thursday and London on Friday, where Mr Zadornov extolled Russia's markets and gave a portrait of the country's reform measures. SBC Warburg and

Deutsche Morgan Grenfell were lead underwriters to the issue, and were looking forward to fat fees from the deal.

Then on Monday President Yeltsin sacked his entire government, including Mr Zadornov, who heard about it in Hamburg. The eurobond was pulled, pending more "stability" in the bond markets.

Wind does not reach me of Mr Zadornov's fate, but I am happy to report that the eurobond issue was back on track yesterday, and with it the investment bankers' fees, which is after all what really matters.

JAMES Heneghe, the 40-year-old co-founder and managing director of Ottakar's, the bookshop chain due to float next month, named the company after a childhood obsession, he tells me. The name refers to *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, from Herge's series of Tintin books, in which the King's sceptre in a fictional Eastern European state becomes the centre of attempts to overthrow the state.

Mr Heneghe decided to avoid any potential copyright conflicts with Tintin's present owners by changing the middle 'o' in his store's name to an 'a'. I still think "Captain Haddock" would have made a splendid name for a bookshop.

Anyway, Mr Heneghe and his co-

founder and non-executive chairman, Philip Dunne, have built the chain up from nothing in 1987 to 47 stores today, 15 of them opening in the last year. They've avoided head-on competition with the heavyweights like Waterstone and Books etc by opening in market towns and the like, from Brighton and Banbury to Llandudno and East Kilbride.

Mr Heneghe spent most of his previous career with Ogilvy & Mather as an account director. Mr Dunne, 39, is a corporate financier who worked for SG Warburg and Phoenix Securities, and is currently managing director of Donaldson Lufkin & Jenrette, the American investment bank.

The team also includes Neil Lloyd, 32, the finance director, who trained with accountants Baker Tilly and was financial controller of Harvey Nichols during its flotation. John Thornton, 54, chairman of Thornton's chocolates, is also on the board as a non-executive director.

CONGRATULATIONS to the emerging markets settlements team from Deutsche Morgan Grenfell's back office, who drank their way to victory at the Hogshead City Beer Challenge on Monday night.

This isn't as bad as it sounds: Tom Craven and his DMG colleagues didn't actually win the contest by drinking

more than anyone else. They simply had to identify eight beers from a list of 20.

It was all for charity. The evening attracted 18 teams from the Square Mile and raised £5,000 for the Richard Langhorn trust. Over 40 teams competed in four heats, and the DMG team only won after a nail-biting sudden death play-off (or should that be drink-off?) in the final, with four other teams on equal scores.

The runners-up were, in descending order: Lambs to the Slaughter (Lloyd's Chambers); Anglo Rom Old Street Slappy Happy Chappies (ACT Financial Systems); IMRO, and Richards Butler.

Mr Craven and his seven colleagues have won an all-expenses-paid weekend trip to the Caledonian Brewery in Edinburgh, where they will sample everything the company has to offer.

Sounds like DMG had better start recruiting back-office replacements immediately. They'll never find their way back to the airport.

OUR commiserations to Sir Bruce MacPhail, managing director of P&O, who missed the press briefing yesterday for the best set of annual results in years. Lord Sterling, chairman, said Sir Bruce was not there "because he has a gut problem". Our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Roll-out of home delivery service boosts Iceland sales

ICELAND, the frozen food retailer seen as a high street struggler a year ago, reported a huge surge in sales yesterday, boosted by its national roll-out of home delivery. Same store sales rose 4.4 per cent last year and are 16 per cent ahead in current trading, though the company admitted that level was not sustainable. Iceland shares rose 10 per cent to 197.5p as analysts upgraded profit forecasts. This was in spite of a dip in profits from £56m to £43.5m. Iceland is now testing home shopping, which will enable customers to telephone orders in from home. Investment column, page 24

Bluebird finds counter bidder

BLUEBIRD Toys yesterday said it had received approaches which may or may not lead to an offer from a company other than Guinness Peat Group, whose hostile bid it continues to resist. Bluebird said it continued to urge shareholders to reject a bid from GPG, adding that GPG told it last week that it had received acceptances of its bid representing only 0.05 per cent of Bluebird. Bluebird said it had received the offers since the GPG bid was announced on 19 January, but offered no further details. A further announcement will be made as soon as possible, it said.

Speciality Shops in £37m deal

SPECIALITY Shops, a subsidiary of Milner Estates, is selling a portfolio of four properties in a £37m deal. Waverley Shopping Centre in Edinburgh, is being sold to Scottish Metropolitan Property, which already has a 50 per cent stake in Waverley, which comprises 57 retail units and a food court. It is buying the rest for £25m. Speciality Shops is selling three other shopping centres to Arcadia for £12.55m.

EU clears hotel sale to Bass

BASS's acquisition of the Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts chain from Japan's Saison Group was cleared by European Union regulators yesterday, boosting Bass's presence in the luxury hotel market and expanding its hotel business outside the UK. The European Commission said it cleared the \$2.9bn (£1.8bn) purchase after a month-long investigation showed that Bass would not "create or strengthen a dominant position which would significantly impede competition".

Matalan plans flotation

MATALAN, which operates a fast-growing chain of out-of-town clothing stores, yesterday announced plans to seek a listing on the London Stock Exchange in a flotation that is expected to value it at about £200m. The news came as the company announced record results for the year to 31 December, showing sales up 24 per cent to £229.6m and an 87 per cent lift in pre-tax profit to £12.7m.

Britannic profits rise

BRITANNIC Assurance, which specialises in selling insurance to people on low incomes, yesterday posted a rise in operating profit to £174m last year from £82m in 1996. The figures included a profit on the embedded value of its life and pensions funds of £93m. Britannic shares gained 43.5p to close at 1.356p.

COMPANY RESULTS				
Company	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Asda (P)	600.7m (817.5m)	45.4m (24.4m)	9.8p (5.4p)	2.1p (0.0)
Asda (S)	12.0m (85.4m)	2.0m (1.1m)	6.2p (3.5p)	1.5p (0.0)
Asda (T)	288.0m (189.7m)	30.3m (27.7m)	45.1p (40.1p)	17.5p (11.0p)
Asda (A)	100.7m (88.5m)	15.8m (14.5m)	16.3p (14.8p)	3.5p (0.0p)
Asda (F)	428.1m (521.9m)	8.7m (8.1m)	18.4p (13.5p)	8.7p (7.7p)
Asda (I)	27.7m (14.6m)	2.7m (0.36m)	3.7p (0.5p)	0.3p (0.0p)
Asda (M)	27.5m (207.1m)	9.1m (6.1m)	10.5p (13.3p)	18.0p (0.0p)
Asda (N)	27.5m (85.2m)	1.7m (0.0m)	7.1p (5.3p)	2.5p (0.0p)
Asda (O)	30.0m (81.1m)	18.5m (12.5m)	47.3p (38.7p)	1.3p (0.0p)
Asda (P)	24.2m (1.3m)	2.5m (2.0m)	6.1p (5.3p)	1.3p (0.0p)
Asda (Q)	11.2m (18.7m)	2.5m (0.0m)	4.8p (0.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (R)	18.2m (7.7m)	0.9m (0.0m)	13.7p (15.6p)	0.2p (0.0p)
Asda (S)	1.35m (1.28m)	33.3m (34.2m)	14.7p (15.1p)	5.4p (0.0p)
Asda (T)	1.5m (1.4m)	2.8m (2.8m)	15.5p (25.7p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (U)	2.8m (2.2m)	0.3m (0.0m)	10.7p (8.4p)	2.5p (0.0p)
Asda (V)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (W)	37.0m (26.5m)	1.1m (0.0m)	7.8p (6.2p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (X)	215.3m (158.9m)	7.1m (0.3m)	4.8p (6.1p)	5.7p (5.7p)
Asda (Y)	215.3m (158.9m)	7.1m (0.3m)	24.3p (88.3p)	17.5p (22.0p)
Asda (Z)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (A)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (B)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (C)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (D)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (E)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (F)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (G)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (H)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (I)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (J)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (K)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (L)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (M)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (N)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (O)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (P)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (Q)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (R)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (S)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (T)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (U)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (V)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (W)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (X)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (Y)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)
Asda (Z)	288.1m (256.3m)	31.5m (27.2m)	15.2p (14.0p)	0.0p (0.0p)

TOURIST RATES			
Australia (dollars)	2.454	Italy (lira)	2,940
Austria (schillings)	20.86	Japan (yen)	265.20
Belgium (francs)	61.27	Malta (lira)	0.645
Canada (\$)	2.369	Netherlands (guilders)	3.3453
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8632	Norway (kroner)	0.34
Denmark (kroner)	11.39	Portugal (escudos)	301.24
Finland (markka)	9.0862	Spain (pesetas)	251.26
France (francs)	9.9338	South Africa (rand)	7.9789
Germany (marks)	2.9997	Sweden (kroner)	12.95
Greece (drachmas)	58.57	Switzerland (francs)	2.4224
Hong Kong (\$)	12.59	Turkey (lira)	386.347
Ireland (pounds)	1.798	USA (\$)	1.6370

Source: Thomson Code
Rates for Indian Rupees only

IF ONLY OUR PRODUCT WASN'T INVISIBLE...

YOU'D SEE IT ALL OVER THE WORLD.

■ If you could buy electricity the way you buy your groceries, our name would be a household name in Europe, India and Asia Pacific too. ■ And because PowerGen is one of the world's leading power project developers, millions of people who can't use our product yet will be able to use it in the future. ■ For many of them it will be the first time in their lives they are able to use electricity of oil. And in many cases, their lives may actually depend on it. ■ So the benefits of our product will certainly continue to be visible, even if our product itself never will be. ■ For more information about PowerGen, please call our information line on 08451 28 30 40. Or visit our Web Site on www.pgen.com

POWERGEN
THE POWER BEHIND POWER

Swiss timing preoccupies Hoddle

By Glenn Moore
Football Correspondent
in Bern



ENGLAND are in Switzerland today as part of their preparations for a World Cup campaign which should open in 80F conditions in Marseilles in June. Yesterday they woke up to a blanket of snow.

It may have turned Bern's medieval city centre into a living picture postcard but it was not what Glenn Hoddle wished to see when he pulled back the curtains.

Having lost nine players from his squad - and had another seven unavailable when it was picked - this was all the England coach needed. "It was in the 60s when we sent someone out here a fortnight ago," he said, "but you can't control the weather."

The game is not thought to be under threat (snow is hardly unique here) but the pitch is likely to be wet if not frozen, not good news for Premiership managers concerned about further injuries or a national coach trying to assess players.

Yet while the match will present a rather different challenge to Tunisia in 12 weeks' time it should be a good test of temperament and technique. The Swiss, in their first match under new management, are expected to provide lively opposition. Despite the injury problems England can still field a useful side and Hoddle is likely to try one or two experiments.

One of these is expected to be the forward pairing of Michael Owen and Alan Shearer. Another is a first start for the 19-year-old West Ham defender Rio Ferdinand. A third possibility is the use of a back four since the Swiss are expected to adopt an Ajax-style 3-4-3 formation.

Hoddle's defensive options are limited by having only one regular full-back, Andy Hinchcliffe, in the squad and he must pass a fitness test on his sore Achilles. Either Steve McManaman or Paul Merson will play in the "hole" behind the strikers, with McManaman also a possible wing-back.

"Ideally you experiment within a structure but this might be a good game to throw people in and see how they handle it," Hoddle said. "There



The England coach, Glenn Hoddle (right), monitors his two teenage charges, Rio Ferdinand (left) and Michael Owen, in a Bern blizzard.

Photograph: Reuters

are not many opportunities left for players to take their chance so my message for those playing tomorrow is to take this one. Every player in the squad has a chance: there are only about 12 to 13 certainties.

"I have a 22 at the back of my

mind but it is not cast in stone. So many players could be injured and I don't want to disappoint myself. I would like to play my first-choice XI soon but that depends on injuries."

Owen, naturally, is the centre of attention, with his picture appearing

in many of the local papers. Hoddle, understandably, said he was "still on trial" for a World Cup place, and was not yet among the dozen or so favourites for France.

"He will be ready in two or three years, I know that about him and Rio.

What I need to find out is will they be ready in two or three months. Michael has a lot to learn, he needs time to develop. He has played a lot of football and I need to see how sharp he is at the end of the season. He could be a very, very good as a substitute."

Shearer, as ever, was not prepared to express a preference as to his striking partner but he said of a link-up with Owen: "I don't think we would let anybody down. He's an interesting player: who's got pace, takes everything in his stride and certain-

ly did not look out of place for England. He is ahead of me at that age, more prolific a scorer and a hell of a prospect. You'd never think he was 18."

Shearer, who would not talk about the Newcastle situation, except to dismiss speculation that they might be relegated, added: "Some partnerships click, some have to be worked at. Me and Les Ferdinand had to do a lot of work but we ended up scoring 50 goals between us."

The Swiss failed to qualify for the World Cup and, having been unable to attract either Tottenham's Christian Gross or Dortmund's Ottmar Hitzfeld, have appointed Gilbert Gross, of Neuchâtel Xamax, as their new coach.

This is his first match in charge and he is expected to rely on a nucleus of experience, notably the talented playmaker Ciriaco Sforza who has inspired Kaiserslautern to the top of the Bundesliga, and Stéphane Chapuisat, whose goal put Dortmund into the European Cup semi-finals last week.

Two Premiership defenders, Stéphane Henchoz and Ramon Vega, are expected to feature while Patrick Muller, an attacking midfielder and a transfer target for Milan, is being lined up for a debut. Marco Grassi, who hit the bar during the 1-1 draw with England in Euro '96, will lead the attack if the prolific Kubilay Türkyilmaz fails a late fitness test.

Having lost their last match at home to Chile England would like to avoid defeat but Hoddle accurately regards the performance as more important than the result. "The Chile match may prove to be a blessing in disguise as it has dampened down some of the euphoria. I want to be positive but realistic. Some people had begun to think we only had to pull our shirts on to lift the World Cup. It is the performance which is most important but if we perform we will win. If we don't, Switzerland are strong enough to spring a surprise."

SWITZERLAND (probable): Corninbois (Neuchâtel Xamax); Weger (Tottenham Hotspur); Vada (VfB Stuttgart); Henchoz (Kaiserslautern); Vogel (Grazhopper Zurich); Winkler (Werder Bremen); Sforza (Kaiserslautern); Muller (Borussia Dortmund); Sassi (Servette Geneva); Türkyilmaz (Grazhopper Zurich); Grassi (AS Cannes); Chapuisat (Ecuropa Dortmund).
ENGLAND (probable): Flowers (Blackburn Rovers); Keown (Aston Villa); Ferdinand (West Ham United); Southgate (Aston Villa); Lee (Newcastle United); Ince (Liverpool); Batty (Newcastle United); Hinchcliffe (Sheffield Wednesday); Merson (Middlesbrough) or McManaman (Liverpool); Owen (Liverpool); Shearer (Newcastle United).

lose yourself
for the day.
Then return to
your beloved
children.
Thingy and
Woisername.

Sharan

صحنه من الامل

new for Arsenal

REPORT

Merson sells Boro to Gascoigne

Football

By Alan Nixon

PAUL GASCOIGNE returned to English football yesterday in a £3m, three-and-a-half year deal with Middlesbrough that owed much to the persuasive powers of Paul Merson.

The transfer has yet to pass the hurdle of a medical, which could prove tricky as Gascoigne has a calf strain, a troublesome hamstring and a possible hernia

problem. Should all go well, he could make his Boro debut in Sunday's Coca-Cola Cup final against Chelsea at Wembley.

The 30-year-old Gascoigne was given the hard sell by Merson, who called the former Newcastle and Tottenham midfielder to tell him how his move to the Teesside club from Arsenal had rejuvenated his game and lifted him back into the England team.

Gascoigne, who will miss out on Rangers' attempt to win

a 10th successive Scottish Premier title, had previously stalled on the transfer, feeling he was being pushed out by chairman David Murray.

Gascoigne joined Rangers from Lazio in June 1995, but this season has seen him start only 16 games and his dwindling influence, through injury and suspension, may have persuaded Murray to let him go with two years still remaining on his contract.

Merson has settled well in

Gascoigne's native North-east and has provided Boro with much needed quality as they push for promotion to the Premiership. He will be ideal company for Gascoigne as he struggles to make England's World Cup squad. His battle with drink, drugs and gambling has won Merson the respect of his fellow professionals and Gascoigne, who has had his share of personal problems, will empathise with him.

Merson's intervention helped

Bryan Robson beat off competition from Premiership strugglers Crystal Palace. "I'm delighted Gazza is joining us," Robson, the Boro manager, said. "He's a great player and our fans will be really excited about watching him play."

"Paul should give us that little extra in midfield, which should help us achieve the ambitions we are setting ourselves."

Gascoigne will join Boro in training today and have his medical "in the next few days".

Whether he plays against Chelsea remains to be seen. "I've got to assess Gazza's fitness and see what he's done with Rangers," Robson said.

Gascoigne's advisor, Mel Stein, revealed that leaving Rangers was one of the toughest decisions his client has had to make in his career.

"He is very, very sad to be leaving Rangers. It's an enormous wrench," Stein said. "Paul said to me 'I've left clubs before, but I've never been so sad about

leaving a club.' I don't think there will be a problem with his medical. He's probably a bit rusty, probably not quite match fit, although he is available for the Coca-Cola Cup final."

"His England ambitions remain as strong as ever. I'm not saying he wouldn't have been picked for the World Cup if he had stayed at Rangers, but clearly there is going to be a bell of a lot of competitive football in the weeks ahead for him."

More good news for Boro



Gascoigne: £3m transfer

yesterday came from their Italian defender Gianluca Festa. Described by Robson as "a model professional", Festa has signed a new five-year contract.

More football, pages 30 and 31

Hussain a shining light for England

Cricket

By Derek Pringle
in St John's, AntiguaEngland 177 & 275-3
West Indies 500-7 dec
Tea

A FIGHTING hundred from Nasser Hussain and a gritty half-century by Graham Thorpe went a long way towards helping England save this final Test match after heavy showers had washed out the morning session of play yesterday.

It was Hussain's sixth Test century and his first against the West Indies. After three frustrating tours here - he broke his hand in the one here nine years ago, and did not get picked for the Test matches last time - the moment was clearly an emotional one, and there were feelings of anger as well as joy when he threaded Carl Hooper backward of cover for the important run.

Although it was a rearguard action, the partnership had echoes of the one between these two at Edgbaston last year. On that occasion, Hussain scored a double hundred and Thorpe a single as Australia were put to the sword. Yesterday was more subdued, but no less worthy of merit, despite it being an exercise in damage limitation rather than a harbinging of victory.

Once the rain had been mopped up in the quaint labour

intensive style peculiar to this ground, a prompt start was made after lunch. With the new ball due one over after the start, Lara, somewhat surprisingly, kept faith with his two spinners.

A curious tactic, given that both Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose had spent the morning with their feet up, it was not entirely out of character. In fact, throughout this whole series Lara has rarely opted for the obvious when more obscure options are available.

He did not persist with his folly for long, however, and four overs later the gangling figure of Ambrose was back running in to bowl with a shiny red new ball in his hand.

Following a loosener, which Hussain cut gleefully for four, Ambrose, partnered at the other end by Franklin Rose, soon warmed to his task to have both batsmen playing and missing. This was the first wave Hussain and Thorpe had to withstand if England were to have a chance of saving the game, a cause helped earlier by the rain, which washed out the morning's play.

They almost did not survive it, an outside edge from Thorpe narrowly failing to carry to Lara at first slip. But it was not all grim survival and there were runs too, as Hussain cut Rose and Ambrose, the latter high over the slips, to the boundary.

Later, Ambrose had the pair ducking as well as he switched



England's Nasser Hussain hits out on his way to an impressive century in the final Test in St John's, Antigua, yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

tactics. With no grass or damp to exploit, it was back to the intimidatory tactics of old as a variety of rib ticklers and throat balls kept the batsmen on their toes.

With an attacking field, and a pitch now close to comatose, it also proved costly and the boundary count increased dramatically, as it had when the spinners bowled in tandem the previous evening.

West Indies domination has long relied on out-and-out pace bowling. But if in the early days subtlety and the ability to move the ball were in short supply, a legacy of canny "know-

how" grew up with the likes of Andy Roberts, Michael Holding and Malcolm Marshall once their youthful limbs began to tire.

The same thing has happened with Ambrose and Walsh. Now in their fast bowling dotage, the pair have be-

come persistent line and length merchants, swapping exploration of the jugular for that of the channel of uncertainty. With over 700 Test victims between them, it is a hit like Richard Branson down-sizing to run the corner shop, except that line and length still

pays dividends when pursued by giants like Walsh and Ambrose.

It is a role, that of the two, Ambrose has settled into better. Mind you, they can still turn up the heat when needed, and at least three of Ambrose's spells in Guyana were, according to some of the England batsmen who faced them, as fast as recent offerings from Allan Donald and Waqar Younis. Not bad for a 34-year old, written off before the disaster in Pakistan before Christmas.

However, the spicy pitches in Trinidad, as well as the big-seamed balls used throughout the series, also helped Ambrose, in particular, is now a taller, faster version of Richard Hadlee, and he lands the ball on the seam virtually six out of six.

When that is the norm rather than the exception - which it is not always when

Walsh bowls - only the deadest pitches remain unexploited. But if the movement offered by the two surfaces at the Queen's Park Oval helped Ambrose's new style, it also renewed his confidence. That is a factor not to be underestimated, even in seemingly unflappable assassins like Ambrose.

In the end, the two Tests

Lara passes his first Test, and Henry Blofeld, page 28

St John's scoreboard

First day: West Indies won 100-0
ENGLAND - First innings 127 (10 overs)
WEST INDIES - First innings 500-7 dec
ENGLAND - Second innings 177-3 (10 overs)
WEST INDIES - Second innings 275-3 (10 overs)

England 177-3 (10 overs) (10-0-0-0)
West Indies 500-7 dec (10-0-0-0)
England 177-3 (10 overs) (10-0-0-0)
West Indies 275-3 (10 overs) (10-0-0-0)

A series when wasted chances put paid to the highest of hopes

By Henry Blofeld

A WET morning gave one the chance to reflect on a series which began at Sabina Park two months ago amid such high hopes for England. It has been a story of bad pitches, wasted opportunities, indifferent umpiring, and the loss of two most important tosses which dictated the likely outcome of the fourth and sixth Tests.

In the final analysis, England were not good enough to beat the West Indies. They had winning chances in three Tests but could only convert one into victory. Too often, when it mattered, England played untidy and ill-disciplined cricket and, significantly, they did not have a Curtly Ambrose or a Courtney Walsh.

There was not enough attention to detail. The inconsistency of Dean Headley and Andrew Cadzow with the new ball was frightening; there were times when the side was not focused sharply enough on what

they had to do and too many important catches were dropped.

They should have won the second Test in spite of some poor umpiring, but they bowled and fielded so badly just when it seemed they must win. If England had left Port of Spain 2-0 up it would have been the West Indies who would have been left to play catch-up cricket.

They could not have done anything about losing the toss in Georgetown. The rain on the last day in Bridgetown was beyond their control, too, but by then the inability to bowl properly at Philo Wallis and Clayton Lambert cost them dear and gave the West Indies an outside chance.

The toss was again crucial in Antigua where the groundsman had made a bad mistake by watering the newly relaid pitch the day before the match. He was afraid it would not hold together, but by doing this he gave the side which bowled first a decisive advantage.

But for England there was

one glorious gain from the tour

and that was the establishment of Mark Ramprakash as an England player. That splendid back-foot drive off Nixon McLean which took him to his century in Bridgetown, enabled him to get over the last psychological hurdle he had to jump and is my abiding memory of this series.

That hundred could hardly have come at a better time for England. Mike Atherton's position must now be in jeopardy and Ramprakash has emerged at precisely the right moment and has become a serious candidate for the job of the next long-term England captain.

No gut reaction thoughts about this series would be complete without a rousing cheer for the wholehearted and magnificent efforts of Angus Fraser. His 20 wickets in the two Port of Spain Tests deserved to give England a 2-0 lead. Without Fraser, England would never have had a sniff of one, let alone three victories.

ORIANA, CONCORDE AND ORIENT-EXPRESS

Madeira, Tenerife and Lisbon 28 Apr - 4 May £1,999
Barcelona, St Tropez, Florence, Pisa 10 - 16 May £1,999
Amsterdam, Bruges and Brussels 22 - 25 May £1,299
Cruise to Tenerife via Madeira 9 - 13 August £1,699

TORONTO WITH NIAGARA, ROCKIES OR NEW YORK

5 nights in Toronto returning superlative on Concorde
Niagara with helicopter, city tour, luncheon and theatre
Depart on 22 May, 4 July, 13 Aug, or 19 Sept. £1,999
Toronto & Rockies with Concorde 18 - 27 Sept. £2,499
4 nights in New York, Concorde, any weekend £1,999

MONACO GRAND PRIX OR WORLD CUP FINAL

Seat and luncheon at Mirabeau for Monaco Grand Prix
with Paris, Concorde and Eurostar 23 - 24 May £1,599
Concorde with World Cup Final seat on 12 July £1,999

ORIENT-EXPRESS, ROME TO VENICE VIA FLORENCE

Fly to Rome, Venice Simplon-Orient-Express to Venice via
Florence, city tours and deluxe hotels 2 - 5 May £999

NEW GRAND PRINCESS WITH CONCORDE

Istanbul, Kusadasi (for Ephesus), Piraeus (for Athens)
and Venice, 5 nights on 19 June or 6 Aug. £1,999
Venice, Naples, Livorno (for Florence), Monte Carlo and
Barcelona, 7 nights on 24 June or 11 Aug. £2,499

QE2 WITH CONCORDE AND ORIENT-EXPRESS

Cruise from Tenerife via Madeira 16 - 20 June £1,699
Midnight Sun & Norwegian Fjords 20 - 31 July £2,999
New York and Toronto 29 Aug - 10 Sept. £3,999

For our brochure, phone 0181-992 4477, or write to:

SUPERLATIVE TRAVEL
43, Woodhurst Road, London, W3 6SS.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD
No. 3567, Wednesday 25 March By Aquila
Thursday's Solution

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9							
13	14						
15							
18							
20							
24							
26							

ACROSS
1 Quilter's works often turned down? (10)
6 Sunday, Day in Germany for men only (4)
9 Despondent, having run out of fuel? (10)
10 A sovereign in iron is counterfeit (4)
12 One from Darwin rating a cabin, perhaps (12)
15 The bill on the way, performing this function? (5-4)
17 Hearing test (5)
18 Meal has no starter, here at The Bull (5)
19 Patience and Anne crude in exchange (9)

DOWN
2 One can derive no benefit from such treatment (5-7)
24 Central character of autotopes (4)
25 Backward company, mostly in the news at church event (10)
26 Limits of ambitions (4)
27 Panel-beating family providing aid for climbers (10)

2 Did boy see trouble, having rebelled? (9)
7 Long-standing practices of Customs, say (10)
8 Environmentalist hastens, seeing these pests (10)
10 Two sprinters come to grief on the slopes here? (6,6)
13 May take well over the hour (10)
14 Mark kept informed, having the way indicated (10)
16 Not just Celia Hunt coming out? (9)
21 To stimulate, trick is to take oxygen (5)
22 Ruin a French party (4)
23 Bill on the bench (4)